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CHICAGO > MID-CENTURY > POP > POST-MODERN

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Winter 2007-08

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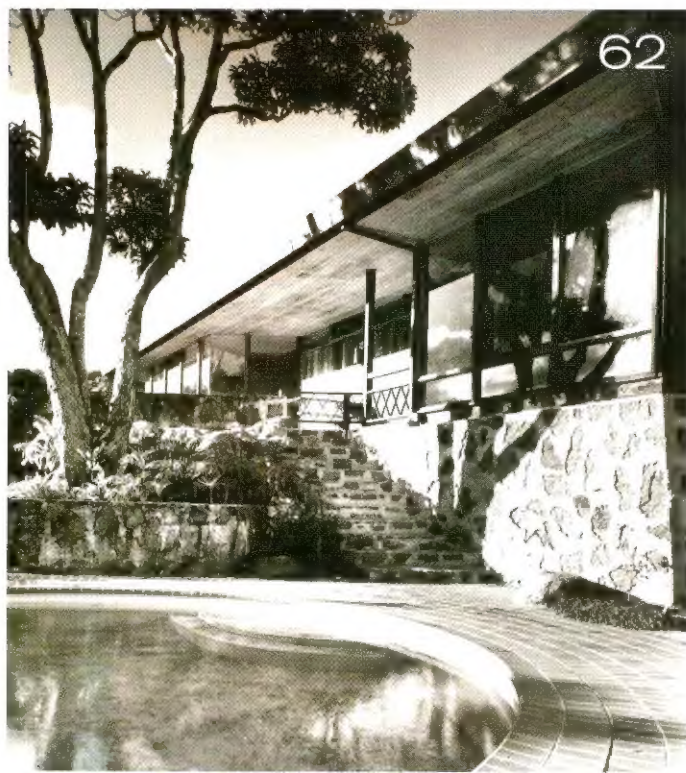
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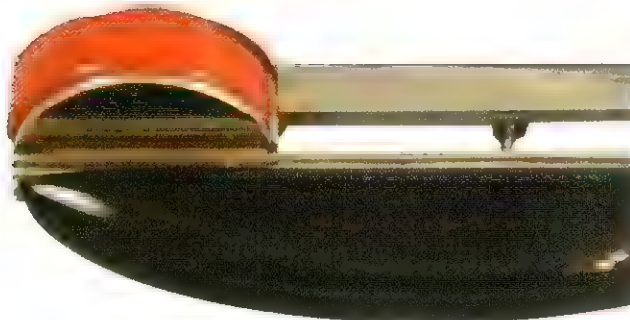
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## Jakob Bengel

*Jakob Bengel (attributed)*  
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Modernism is often blamed for the blandness of today's built environment, from the boxy malls and houses gobbling fields and forests to the steel and glass towers that make one city center indistinguishable from the next. These buildings also embody a dangerously adversarial relationship with the natural world. Forward-looking architects of the last century, in their enthusiasm for the efficiencies of air conditioning, central heating, electric lighting, high-speed elevators and other new technologies, all powered by seemingly limitless supplies of fossil fuels, began to create buildings so well armed against nature that nothing distinguished designs for frozen winters in Montreal from those for boiling summers in Singapore.

But a parallel modernist approach persevered: one that sought the integration of modern architecture with the particular climate, ecology and culture of its site, presaging the green design of today. Some architects, even while experimenting with new materials and technologies, also garnered insight from indigenous building types. In this issue, we present the Hawai'i-based work of architect Vladimir Ossipoff, who adapted the islands' ancient structural forms for modern life. His version of the lanai (outdoor room), his floor plans and passive ventilation systems kept the interiors of his houses comfortable through weather that veered from searing sun to violent wind and rain. On the other side of the Pacific was architect Vann Molyvann, who developed a regional modernist style in his native Cambodia. His designs referenced ancient Khmer forms and refined traditional approaches to extreme heat and flooding.

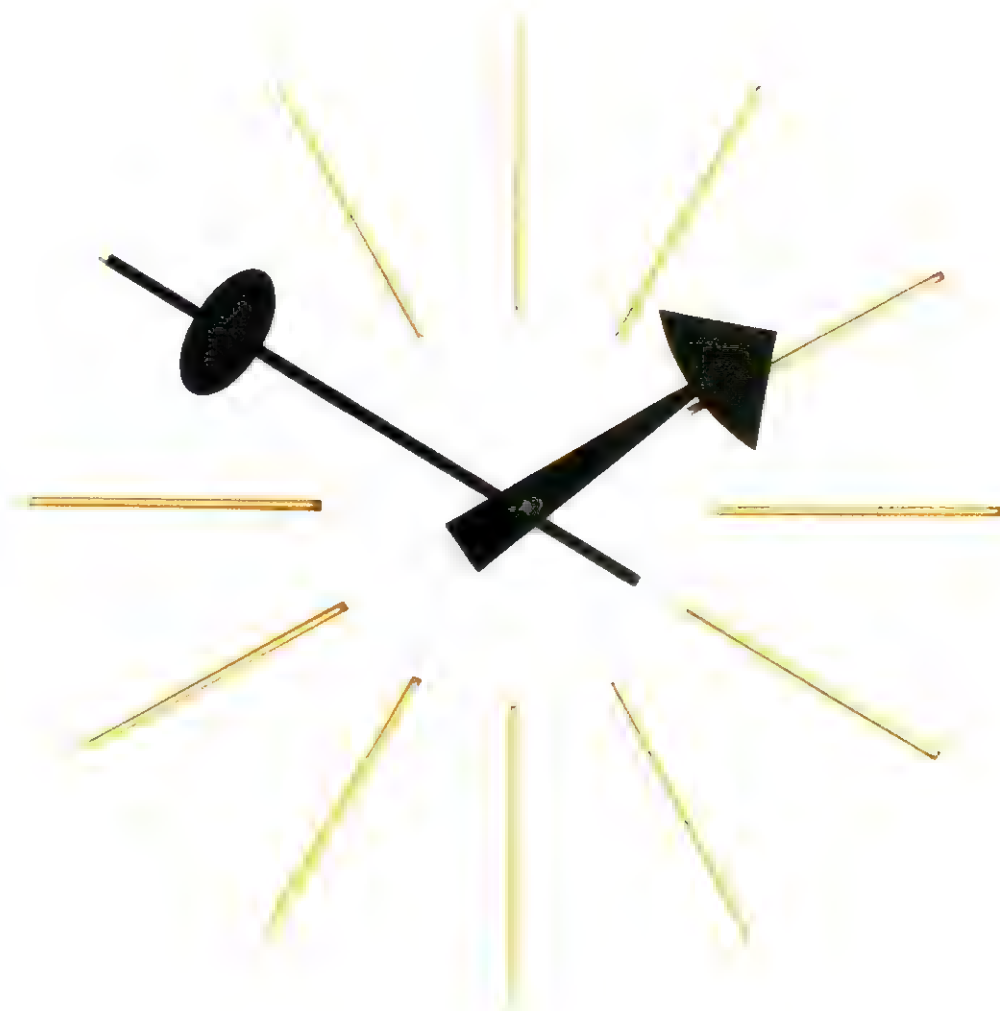
Size also matters, but a deeply entrenched entitlement of affluence in the United States is the gargantuan home. In this issue, we hear about living well in 1,000 square feet from the inhabitant of a house by Albert Frey. Its space-efficient built-in furniture, industrial materials and artful integration with its rocky desert site above Palm Springs model an architectural approach with limited impact on natural resources. And while the house has central air conditioning — few Americans today are willing to suffer 110-degree heat — one can imagine retrofitting it to harness the unrelenting solar rays.

We also consider the work of weaver and textile designer Marianne Strengell, who considered just about any material — paper, cellophane, aluminum, coconut leaves — a potential yarn. And we look at the creation of a novel chair by Isamu Noguchi and Isamu Kenmochi that incorporated ancient bamboo basketry methods. Such innovators were the forerunners of today's environmentally conscious designers.

The progressive arm of the Modern movement saw design as a way to improve the world. As *Modernism* nears its 10th anniversary this Spring, we are ever more committed to bringing you the design stories of the twentieth century whose relevance will only deepen in the twenty-first.

-Andrea Truppin





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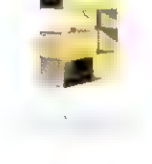
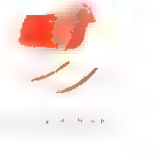




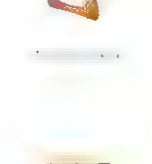

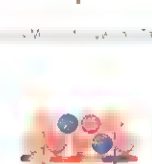



-Jo Diedrich, Roanoke, VA

I just had to write and say that I adore your magazine, having discovered it about a year ago on a casual visit to Design Within Reach. I am a long-time amateur interior designer and a recent convert to modern architecture and design. The intellectual quality and the writing of your articles are light years ahead of those of other design magazines. I'm a big Saarinen fan and was delighted with your article on him several issues back, cutting it out to put in my ever-expanding file of design articles and photos. I know you're not a how-to magazine, but perhaps sometime you could do something on designing for small urban condos and apartments - I mean, how on earth am I supposed to find an ottoman/coffee table for my living room when they are all so huge? Also, please consider publishing monthly, or at least every other month.

Small homes are on our agenda, so stay tuned  
-AT

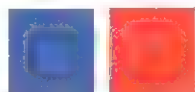


	
Eames Molded Plywood Chair	Eames Molded Plywood Stool
	
Eames Molded Plywood Chair and Ottoman	Eames Molded Plywood Stool
	
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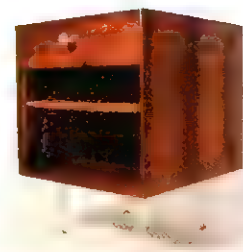
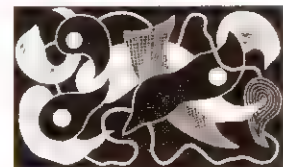
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## IN THE MUSEUMS

### FAST

#### **Design: Isamu Noguchi and Isamu Kenmochi**

Through March 16, 2008

The Noguchi Museum

718/278-2348, [www.noguchi.org](http://www.noguchi.org)

Features a recreation of a 1950 bamboo chair prototype jointly designed by Noguchi and Kenmochi: the result of their efforts to create an exceptional object whose beauty and simplicity were grounded in nature yet embraced modern materials and techniques. [See Back Page p. 112.]

#### **Marcel Breuer: Design and Architecture**

Through February 17, 2008

National Building Museum

202/272-2448, [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org)

A survey of Breuer's wide-ranging oeuvre, from his traditional wood furniture to his influential tubular steel designs to his Brutalist concrete buildings

#### **Designing Modern: 1920 to the Present**

Through February 29, 2008

Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA

215/763-8100, [www.philamuseum.org](http://www.philamuseum.org)

[See Modern Times, p. 26]

#### **The Search to See II: Photographs from the Collection of Frederick B. Scheel**

Through March 30, 2008

Minneapolis Institute of Arts

612/870-3131, [www.artsmia.org](http://www.artsmia.org)

More than 400 photographs by notable photographers, including Alfred Stieglitz, Paul Strand, Edward Weston and Henri Cartier-Bresson



Cindy Sherman, *Untitled Film Still #56* 1980 Black-and-white photograph



Ana Lisa Hedstromm, *Coat*, c. 1985. Silk crepe de Chine.

Photo by Jon Bo ten, Racine, WI Courtesy Racine Art Museum

#### **Icons of Elegance: The Most Influential Shoe Designers of the 20th Century**

Through January 20, 2008

#### **Cloaking Devices: Clothing and its Interpretations from RAM's Collections**

Through March 30, 2008

Racine Art Museum

262/638-8300, [www.ramart.org](http://www.ramart.org)

"Icons of Elegance" features exceptional examples of this essential 20th-century fashion accessory by designers such as Salvatore Ferragamo, Roger Vivier and Manolo Blahnik. "Cloaking Devices" presents artist-made clothing, artworks inspired by clothing and wearable artworks, as well as photographic portraits by Karl Lagerfeld, the designer for Chanel

#### **Beauty and the Blonde: An Exploration of American Art and Popular Culture**

Through January 28, 2008

Mildred Lane Kemper Art Museum, Washington University

314/935-4523, [www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu](http://www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu)

The first museum show to investigate the image of the blonde in a range of media including film, photography, collage, painting, sculpture, video, posters and print.

#### **Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future**

Through March 30, 2008

Cranbrook Academy of Art

248/645-3323, [www.cranbrookart.edu/museum](http://www.cranbrookart.edu/museum)

A retrospective of Finnish architect Eero Saarinen (1910–61), designer of American modernist landmarks such as the TWA terminal at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York (1956–62), and the iconic *Womb* chair and "Pedestal" series for Knoll



## WEST

### Palm Springs, CA

#### Julius Shulman / Palm Springs

February 15 – May 2, 2008

Palm Springs Art Museum

760/325-7186, [www.psmuseum.org](http://www.psmuseum.org).

More than 150 of Shulman's photographs of significant structures in Palm Springs by architects such as E. Stewart Williams, Albert Frey, William Cody and Donald Wexler, as well as architects' renderings and models. [See *Modern Times*, p. 26]

### Honolulu, HI

#### Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff

Through January 27, 2008

Honolulu Academy of Arts

808/532 8734, [www.honoluluacademy.org](http://www.honoluluacademy.org)

A leader in tropical Modernism, Russian-born architect Vladimir Ossipoff (1907–98) helped transform Hawaii from a plantation outpost to a modern U.S. state with more than 1,000 completed projects. This exhibit focuses on Ossipoff's career and the impact of his work on post-war architecture in the Pacific region. [See *Hawaiian Modern: Vladimir Ossipoff in New Territory*, p. 62.]

Photo: Getty Images; used with permission of Julius Shulman Photography Archive



Julius Shulman, *Edris Pool* at the Edris House (1953), designed by E. Stewart Williams, Palm Springs, California

## SOUTH

### Miami Beach, FL

#### Fashioning the Modern French Interior: Pochoir Portfolios in the 1920s

Through May 11, 2008

Wolfsonian-FIU

205/521-1001, [www.wolfsonian.fiu.edu/exhibitions](http://www.wolfsonian.fiu.edu/exhibitions)

Pochoir (stencil) portfolios used for marketing modern interiors highlight the tense relationship between traditional and modern design in 1920s France

## INT'L

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### Paris, France

#### Richard Rogers & Architects

Through March 3, 2008

Centre George Pompidou

+33 1 44 78 12 33, [www.centrepompidou.fr](http://www.centrepompidou.fr)

The work of the Pritzker Prize winner and his associates from the 1960s through the present, including a look at the development of his Pompidou Center design from the 1970s.

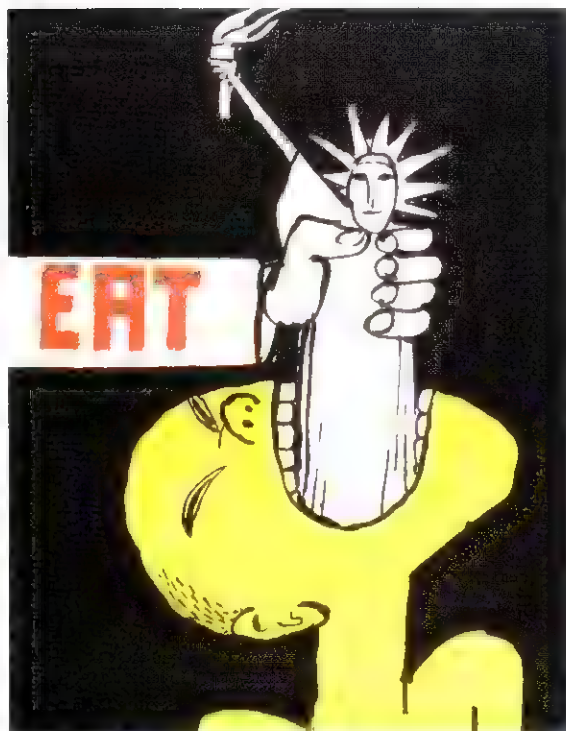
### Strasbourg, France

#### Musée Tomi Ungerer – Centre International de l'Illustration

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A new museum dedicated to the graphic works of Tomi Ungerer (b. 1931), the internationally renowned artist, illustrator and children's book author who has donated much of his work to his home town of Strasbourg. The museum will also host revolving exhibitions of 20th-century illustration and graphic design from around the world



Tomi Ungerer, *Eat*, 1967. Poster against the Vietnam War

Photo by Nicolas Fassin / Musée de Strasbourg; Diogenes Verlag AG, Zürich





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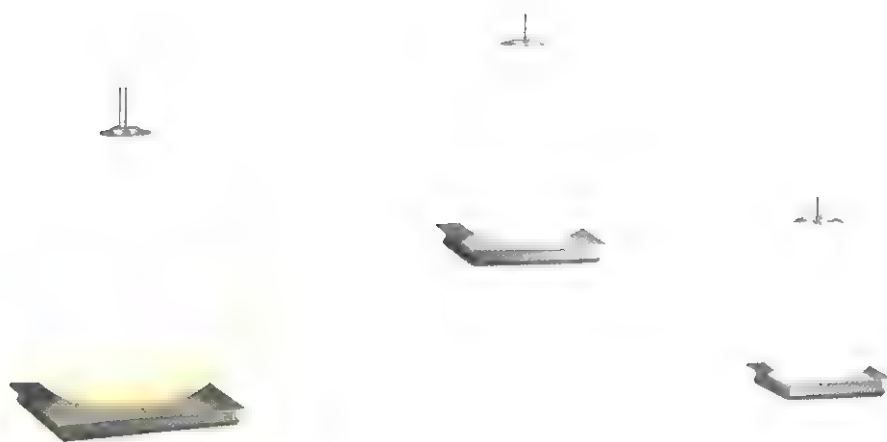
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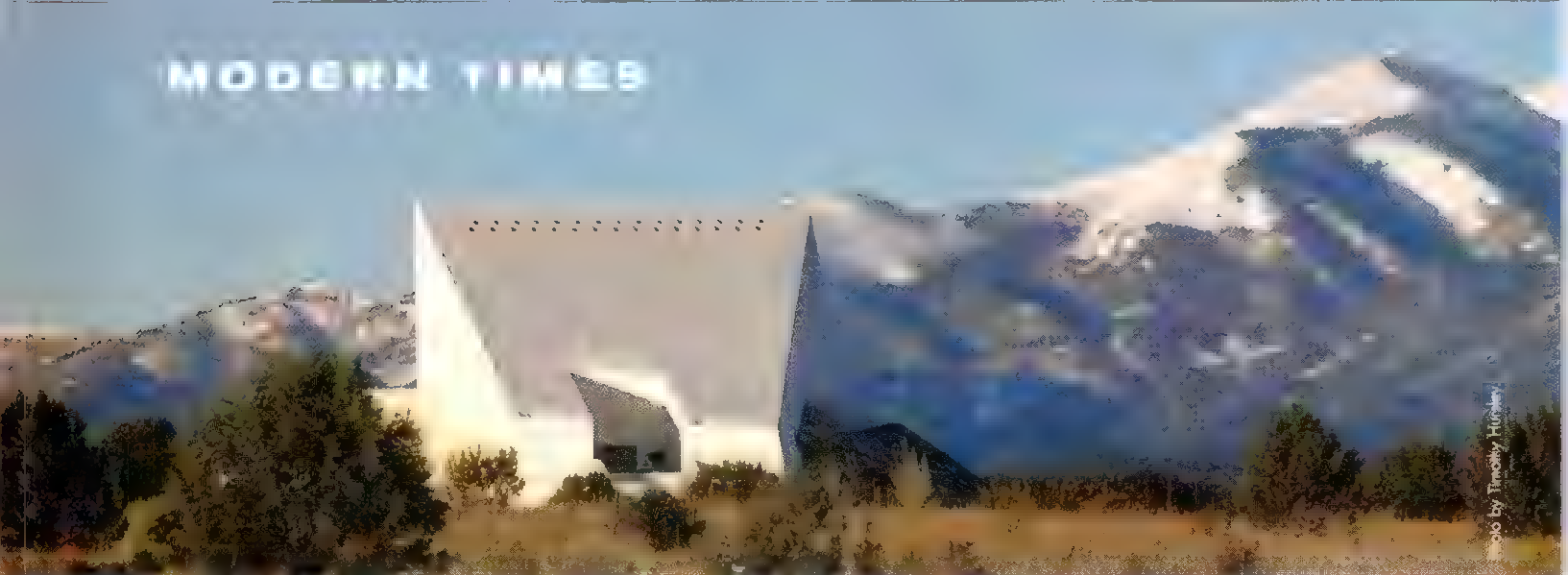
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**Above** Antoine Predock, Spencer Theater for the Performing Arts. Ruidoso, New Mexico. 1997.

## Annual Awards Announced

Robert Venturi the 1991 Pritzker Architecture Prize winner, and his collaborator, Denise Scott Brown, are among several influential figures of late 20th-century design to be honored with this year's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Awards. Recipients of the Design Mind Award, which honors a visionary who has effected a paradigm shift in design thinking, the Philadelphia-based pair are credited with spearheading the postmodern movement in the United States. In their built works and their best-selling books, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* by Venturi, and *Learning from Las Vegas*, by Venturi, Scott Brown and Steven Izenour, they embraced historical styles and popular culture in an often humorous rebuke to orthodox Modernism.

Arizona-based architect Antoine Predock won the Lifetime Achievement Award for his sober monumental projects, such as the Nelson Fine Arts Center at Arizona State University in Tempe which respond to their natural and historical environment while remaining resolutely modern. The Design Patron Award went to textile manufacturer Maharam, founded in 1902, a family-run company that continues to collaborate with contemporary designers and artists, while re-editing significant historical fabrics created by 20th-century designers such as Anni Albers, the Eameses and Gio Ponti. Landscape architect Peter Walker, who has been designing and teaching for more than 50 years and who partnered with architect Michael Arad in the winning design for the World Trade Center Memorial won the Landscape Design Award. The Product Design Award went to Jonathan Ive, of Apple Inc. who tames technologically complex products into user-friendly, sculptural objects. Design theorist Frank Ching, who has influenced generations of design students with his writing and illustration on architecture, won the Special Jury Commendation. For more information, visit [www.cooperhewitt.org](http://www.cooperhewitt.org).

—Andrea Truppin



**Above** Peter Walker and Partners, Solana, Westlake and Southlake, Texas, 1989



## Tecta Ponies Up

The German company Tecta specializes in high-quality licensed re editions of furniture designed by early 20th-century designers. The company's owner, Axel Bruchhauser, an avid researcher and collector, also runs the ever-expanding Cantilever Chair Museum of early modernist furniture by both well-known and anonymous designers, situated on the lawn next to his factory in the rural town of Lauenförde. His passion for unearthing and reproducing hitherto unknown or unavailable pieces, and variations on iconic ones, is legendary. Marcel Breuer sometimes upholstered his steel-tube chairs in brown and white "Pony" cowhide in the 1920s, and Tecta's latest initiative includes a special edition of two of his chairs using this material. The D4 F, left, a folding chair designed in 1927, similar to the familiar *Wassily* chair, is available for €654 and the D40 F, a tubular steel cantilever chair circa 1928, is €591. Also new in cowhide is a dynamically reclining lounge chair (you slide your body to adjust the seat and back) with flattened tubular steel arms designed by Bruchhäuser, with the input of Jean Prouvé, in 1983, for €1,788. For information on retailers in the U.S., visit [www.tecta.de](http://www.tecta.de).

—AT



## Aalto for All

Nearly 4,000 intrepid Alvar Aalto fans journey to the architect's 1952 Saynatsalo Town Hall, right, in remote Finland each year, but a new Internet exhibition makes it accessible to everyone. Aalto's design for the building was chosen by competition, and the noted architect's modern though tradition-conscious red-brick complex put this small island mill town on the map. Aalto also designed custom light fixtures, furniture and decorative elements throughout the interior, and commissioned (and paid for) a painting by his friend Fernand Léger for the council chamber. Though Saynatsalo Island was annexed to the city of Jyväskylä in 1993, the building is still in use and open to visitors. The exhibition is on Jyväskylä's municipal website, and includes numerous drawings and new and archival photographs, as well as a detailed narrative of the building's history in Finnish and English. The web link is [www3.jkl.fi/saynatsalo/townhall](http://www3.jkl.fi/saynatsalo/townhall)

And in other Aalto news, the Alvar Aalto Museum in Jyväskylä has released the first volume of a new "Aalto Studies" scholarly series. The seven essays in *Aino and Alvar Aalto – A Shared Journey: Interpretations of an Everyday Modernism* by Renja Suominen-Kokkonen, a professor at the University of Helsinki, focus on the



important role of Aalto's wife, Aino, also an architect, on his work. To order, email [museum@alvaraalto.fi](mailto:museum@alvaraalto.fi).  
—Kate Fogarty

## Object Lessons

The Philadelphia Museum's impressive holdings of 20th-century design have been given a spacious new gallery and the inaugural show, "Designing Modern: 1920 to the Present," is magnificent indeed. The 2,000-square-foot Collab Gallery for Modern and Contemporary Design, housed in the museum's recently renovated Ruth and Raymond G. Perelman Building, is the culmination of years of devoted collecting by Collab—a nonprofit organization of Philadelphia-area design professionals whose mission is to build the museum's modern and contemporary decorative art collections

and programs. The previous gallery was too small to adequately represent the breadth of the collection which now comprises 2,500 objects. On view through February 29 are 140 of its highlights, including Ettore Sottsass's 1981 *Casablanca* sideboard, Alessandro Mendini's 1978 *Proust* armchair, Art Deco fabric designs from the 1920s by Raoul Dufy and Alfred Latour; and Herbert Bayer and Laszlo Moholy Nagy's typographical masterpiece, the exhibition catalogue *Staatliches Bauhaus in Weimar, 1919–23*. For more information: [www.philamuseum.org](http://www.philamuseum.org). —KF

**Below** Kaj Franck, "Kilta" tableware, designed 1948–52. Glazed earthenware, various sizes.





## Desert Delights

Make your plans to join fellow 20th-century design enthusiasts in sunny Palm Springs for the third annual Modernism Week, to be held February 15 to 24 at various venues. The eighth annual Modernism Show is the week end of February 16 and 17 at the Palm Springs Convention Center; other events include vintage car and fashion shows, a screening of the 2006 documentary "Sketches of Frank Gehry" by Sydney Pollack and numerous tours of the area's celebrated mid-century houses, some of which are also hosting parties. There is also a lecture by famed architectural photographer Julius Shulman, whose exhibition *Julius Shulman / Palm Springs*, with 150 photographs taken over the past 70 years in the area, is at the Palm Springs Art Museum. The week kicks off with the dedication of a star for architect Donald Wexler on the Walk of Fame, located in front of the former Santa Fe Federal Savings building (1960), designed by E. Stewart Williams. Wexler's local achievements include the Palm Springs International Airport (1965) the Spa Hotel (1969) as Wexler & Harrison) and his prefab Alexander Steel Houses of the 1960s

Photo by Bill Anderson, courtesy Palm Springs Historical Society



**Above** Frey & Chambers, Tramway Gas Station, Palm Springs, CA, 1965

Modernism Week is a collaboration among the Modernism Show, Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, Palm Springs Historical Society, Palm Springs Modern Committee, Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce and the Palm Springs Art Museum. For more information: [www.modernismweek.com](http://www.modernismweek.com). —KF

## Holland's Postwar Heritage Protected

The Nazi occupation of the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945 left the country wrecked and impoverished as cities and infrastructure were bombed or neglected and the country's industrial capacity was dismantled and transferred to



Germany. With the help of Marshall Plan aid from the U.S., the Dutch rebuilt their economy from scratch between 1945 and the late 1960s. This period, known as the *Wederopbouw* (Reconstruction Years), saw an enormous amount of construction. To meet the demands of postwar Holland, architects and contractors gratefully drew on the achievements of Modernism, both technological, such as the use of concrete and prefabrication, and ideological, including its approaches to aesthetics, healthy living and urban planning. The National Service for Archaeology, Cultural Landscape and Built Heritage (RACM) and Ronald Plasterk, the Secretary of Cultural Affairs, have now presented a list of one hundred factories, churches, villas, public offices, residential districts and other landmarks built between 1940 and 1958 to be awarded state protection as well as funding for maintenance and restoration. Among the most striking structures are Rotterdam's Bijkorf department store (1957) by Marcel Breuer and the adjacent constructivist sculpture by Naum Gabo (1955), left; the exterior of the Hoogovens steel company headquarters (1951) by Willem Dudok in IJmuiden; the Mart Visser villa (1956) by Gerrit Rietveld in Bergeijk and the National Memorial (1956) by J.J. Oud in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam residential district of Frankendael, designed and planned by Ben Merkelbach, Mart Stam and Aldo van Eyck in 1957, has been saved by the bell: due to its new status as a national landmark, advanced demolition plans will have to be reconsidered. For more information: [www.racm.nl](http://www.racm.nl). —Wanda Nikkels



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## Putting Leedy on the Map

If you're planning to warm up in Florida this winter, you might consider a side trip to Winter Haven, a small town midway between Tampa and Orlando with lots of buildings by architect Gene Leedy. One of an informal group of architects known as the Sarasota School, which gathered steam in the late 1940s, flowered in the '50s and '60s and claimed Paul Rudolph as its most famous member, Leedy sought to develop a regional style of Modernism. [See *Modernism* Vol. 6, No. 4.] He used local materials and natural ventilation and experimented with modular design, pre-stressed concrete and other new low cost construction technologies. Leedy moved to Winter Haven in 1954 and opened his firm; now 78, with an incorrigible sense of humor and unflagging energy, he still lives and works there today. Recently, the Main Street Winter Haven project, part of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program, which encourages downtown revitalization within the context of historic preservation, produced a self-guided tour of Leedy's 28 Winter Haven projects with a keyed map and a 60-minute companion audio guide. Download the tour from [www.geneleedy.com](http://www.geneleedy.com) or order from Main Street Winter Haven at 863/295-9422.

—AT



**Above** Gene Leedy's Winter Haven office, designed in 1960, with its pre-stressed concrete T-beam system which enabled large expanses of column-free space.



## Cool n' hot plastic chair

Many progressive ideas on child rearing have come out of Germany: Friedrich Froebel invented the modern kindergarten there in the mid 1800s, equipped with abstract objects for encouraging open-ended imaginative play. Later, Bauhaus designer Alma Buscher created toys and children's furniture that exemplified the "pedagogical principles of the Bauhaus," according to her colleague Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, "self-affirming creativity as a basis for primary forms of self-expression." It was in this spirit that German designer Walter Papst (born 1924) designed a line of children's furniture for Wilkhahn in the 1950s and '60s using glass-fiber reinforced plastic (GRP). One especially popular piece was the *Rocking Sculpture*—a stylized rocking horse. It received a "Good Toy" award in Ulm in 1960 and a prize at the Triennale di Milano in 1961. Now, on the occasion of the company's 100th anniversary, Wilkhahn has reissued the *Rocking Sculpture* in a limited edition of 1,500 in recyclable polyethylene—priced at \$290 plus shipping and sales tax. To order, email [info@wilkhahn.com](mailto:info@wilkhahn.com).

—AT

## Archival All-Stars

KnollTextiles's new Archival Collection, introduced on the occasion of the company's 60th anniversary, honors the innovations and designers that shaped its historic past. The textile unit, the first effort to align the production of commercial furniture with the production of fabrics, was established in 1947 by Florence Knoll, who found existing fabrics drab and conventional. Dorothy Cosonas, current creative director of KnollTextiles, pored through the company's archives to find fabrics that both embodied Knoll's classic modern design sensibility and were adaptable to today's market. All have impressive pedigrees: The upholstery fabric *Fibra* is based on a 1953 drapery by Hungarian designer Eszter Haraszty. *Mira* is a variation on a 1958 design by Ross Littell. *Cyclone* inset, the winning entry from a student competition for casement fabrics in 1972, has been reintroduced as a drapery fabric and as *Whirlwind* for Knoll's Imago durable resin building material. *Eclat*, right, a woven upholstery, was designed by Anni Albers in 1974. *Cato*, a high-performance upholstery fabric in continuous production since 1961, expands into five new colors. For more information, visit [www.knolltextiles.com](http://www.knolltextiles.com).

—KF





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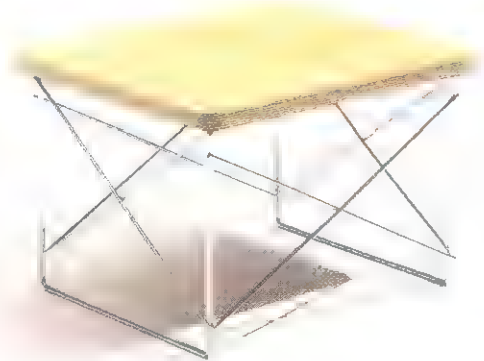
# Modernism Readers Respond

A hearty Thank You! to all those who responded to our recent reader survey. And congratulations to Rebekah Fry of Los Angeles, winner of the Eames Wire-Base Table so generously donated as a prize by Hive Modern of Portland, Oregon [www.hivemodern.com](http://www.hivemodern.com).

I love my new table," says Fry. "I put it right next to my platform bed. It's the perfect place for a cup of tea, my reading glasses and a stack of *Modernism* magazines. I started reading *Modernism* after I moved into my first home and began collecting mid-century modern furniture and ceramics. It quickly became my favorite magazine. It's not only an educational tool, but also entertaining reading for a modern design fanatic like myself."

We learned a lot about you, our readers, from the survey. More than a third of you are involved in the design professions, as an architect, artist, artisan, interior designer, product designer, graphic designer or antiques or modern design dealer. A large majority of you are most interested in mid-century modern design followed by Scandinavian modern, Art Deco and Streamline moderne.

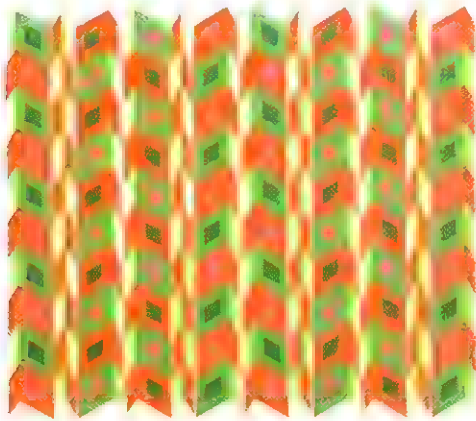
**Right** Charles and Ray Eames. Eames Wire-Base Table, introduced in 1950 by Herman Miller



You are also passionate collectors and surround yourselves with the design you love. More than half of you collect furniture, and almost half collect books. A sizable number collect dinnerware, fine art, ceramics, housewares, glass, lighting and jewelry. You tend to gather most of your finds at galleries, stores, estate sales, thrift shops and flea markets, and nearly ninety percent of you also shop online.

You are also readers; almost half of you read most of each issue and more than a third read every word. You most enjoy articles about interiors and architecture, followed by design history and designer profiles. Next come architectural preservation, new product news and source guides. And a quarter of you would like to see more "how-to" stories.

We were happy to learn that nearly two-thirds of you feel that *Modernism* magazine gives you exactly what you need. But we want to do even better! The more we know what you want to see in the magazine, the more we can deliver. So please tell us how you felt about an article, a product we featured, a museum show we directed you to or a letter from another reader. Email [andrea@modernismmagazine.com](mailto:andrea@modernismmagazine.com). We're all ears!



Sheridan Latimer, *Screens* 1974. 31" x 34"

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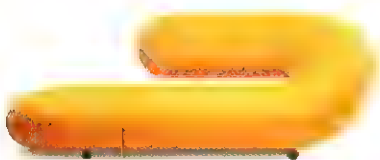
Peter Young, *Screens* 1973. 48" x 35"



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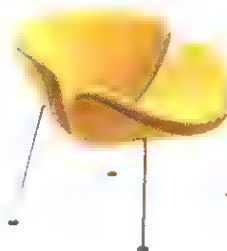
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# Made in Miami

By Saxon Henry



Courtesy of Kiera Farkas



Though Miami Modern, or MiMo, has become a popular moniker for a local midcentury architectural style, the curators of an exhibition that opened at the Bass Museum of Art in Miami Beach on December 5th have found that there is much more to this name than bricks and mortar. "The meaning of these mid-century buildings, like the Eden Roc hotel is not just the building," remarks Thomas Hine, the Bass's Guest Curator of Design, Decorative Arts and Popular Culture. "It's also the Cadillac that sweeps up to the building, the woman in gloves and a mink collar who gets out of the Cadillac and the fanciful environment she walks through."

Hine collaborated with Allan T. Shulman, Guest Curator of Architecture and Urban Planning, and Ruth Grim, Curator of Collections at the Bass to create "Promises of Paradise: Staging Mid-Century Miami," which will be on view at the museum through April 13, 2008. The 20-year sweep — from 1945 to 1965 — takes in everything from fabrics and furniture to hotels and university campuses.

This exploration of postwar Miami was originally destined for a previous exhibition showcasing the 1930s Miami Beach architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon. But the more the trio delved into the time span from the 1930s to the 1950s, the more clearly they saw it as a distinct subject. They also realized that in post-war Miami architecture was only the beginning of the conversation. "Though architecture and urbanism are important," Shulman explains, "we felt that we should also be looking at popular culture, which means everything that was produced in Miami during that period."

Furniture by Morris Lapidus bequeathed to the museum by the architect upon his death in 2001, became the new exhibition's nucleus. "Lapidus's work tends to be modern on the outside while on the inside his reference tends to be the luxurious settings seen in the movies," remarks Hine. "The furniture from his apartment that we are showing combines modern materials with fanciful, highly ornamental forms."

A thrust of the exhibition is to reconcile the luxury indulgence and fantasy of Miami of that time with the International Style that dominated architecture in the U.S. "This was what compelled us to look at the subject of mid-century Miami in a broader sense," Grim remarks.

**Top** George Farkas, Double Gooseneck Lamp 1947. Metal with parchment shades.

**Above, left** Pool and diving board at the Castaways Hotel, c. 1950, designed by Charles McKirahan. Photograph from *Florida Architecture* magazine, 1958.

**Left** Morris Lapidus, Dining room table and 8 chairs, 1960, from Lapidus's Miami Beach apartment. Glass, Lucite and brass



Bass Museum of Art Gift of Morris Lapidus



"We wanted to show it in a context that takes it seriously."

Lapidus is not the only star of the exhibition, which also includes Alfred Browning Parker, George Farkas, Frederick Rank, Igor Polevitzky, Rufus Nims, Kay Pancoast and Fran Williams, and covers International Modernism, Regional Modernism and Fantasy Modernism. "During the first ten years, between 1945 and 1955, the first two categories were more important," Hine says. "During the second decade from 1955 on, the idea of glamour and fantasy takes over."

No luminary of the period exemplifies fantasy more than Lapidus, who made his mark with his hotels the Eden Roc, the Fontainebleau and the Americana, the last now threatened with demolition. "How is Morris Lapidus modern?" quips Hine. "That's a complicated question, because the exteriors of his buildings are certainly shaped by European Modernism, Oscar Niemeyer and South American responses to European Modernism. But there is a fantastic element to his interiors, the stairway to nowhere and the dreamlike quality of his environments."

As the curators searched for iconic MiMo finds, naysayers claimed that Miami's Modernism didn't exist outside of ideas imported from Europe and California. But at the very least, the furniture on display, much of it created by artisans in Coconut Grove, reinforces the idea of an indigenous Modernism in Miami, though it is clearly a hybrid style. Key pieces include a shelving unit designed by Rank that morphs into a dining table and Plexiglass dining room furniture by Lapidus. A diving board, designed by Polevitzky, introduces the pool-side lifestyle, which, along with textiles by Farkas, underscores the exhibition's strong regionalist theme. "Even someone like Farkas, who came from Hungary and would clearly fall into the category of International Modernism, was creating fabrics with great floppy leaves and gnarly rooted trees that speak of Miami's tropical environment," Hine remarks.

What most fascinates Shulman is the effort, in counterpoint to Miami's image of "flabbergast" hotels and postcards from paradise "to develop a tropical architecture and to find some basis of authenticity in the Florida lifestyle," he says. "Modernism is often viewed as a polemical style, but in Miami, it had been de-radicalized, de-polemized, regionalized, and as a result of all that, popularized. It's really difficult to imagine another place in America where Modernism was the de facto style of almost everything that was going on."

The curators hope that the exhibition not only brings new awareness of those who created Miami Modernism, which paradoxically "is most authentic when it is most artificial," says Hines, but spurs efforts to preserve their work. "Unfortunately, we've seen the wholesale demolition of things like Motel Row in Sunny Isles," he says, "and the tearing down of postwar houses in Coconut Grove to be replaced by mini mansions." Some of the designers in the show "are so close to being forgotten," Grim remarks. "In some cases, we have gotten there just in the nick of time."

**Saxon Henry** writes about architecture, interior design and art for *The Miami Herald* and other publications, and is the author of *Big Home, Big Challenge: Design Solutions for Larger Spaces*. Her last article for *Modernism* was *City Report: Buenos Aires* (Vol. 10, No. 2).

*Promises of Paradise* is accompanied by the book *Miami Modern Metropolis: Architecture & Urbanism in the Tropics 1945-1969*, edited by Allan T. Shulman and published by the Bass Museum of Art. Available at the museum bookstore, [www.bassmuseum.org](http://www.bassmuseum.org).

Courtesy of the Village of Bal Harbour

Courtesy of Georgetown University



**Top** Morris Lapidus, The Terrarium in the Americana Hotel, 1956. Drawing from a City of Bal Harbour promotional brochure

**Above** George Farkas, Fabric Design (Leaf) c. 1950. Cotton.



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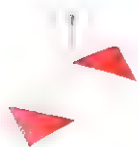
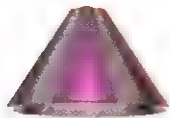
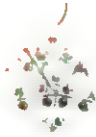
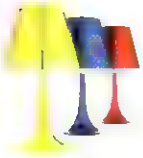
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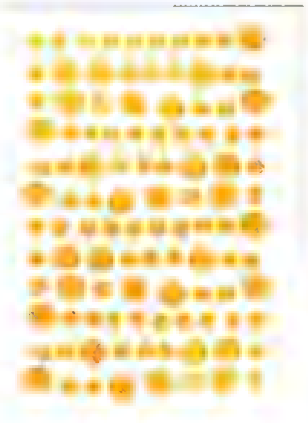
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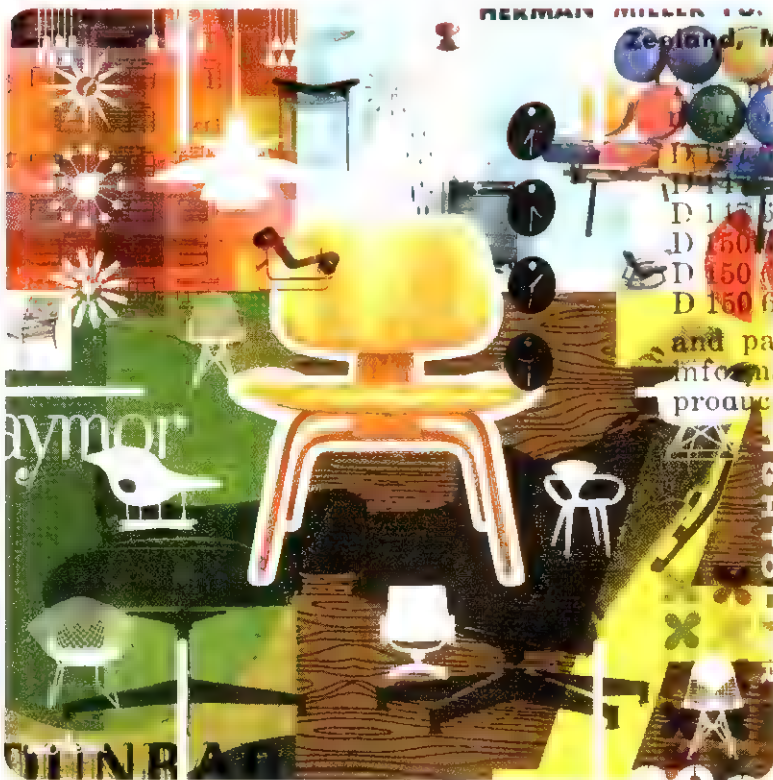




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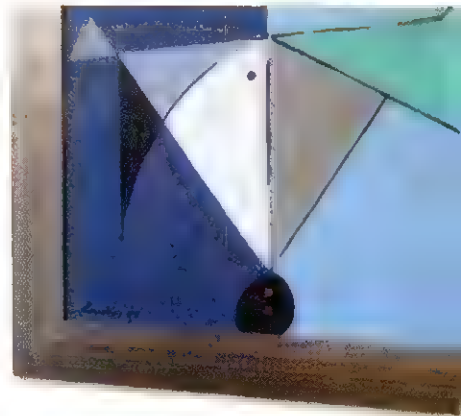
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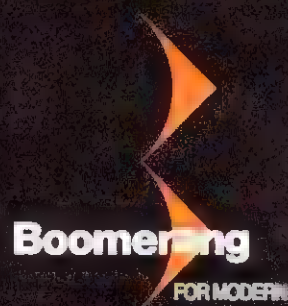
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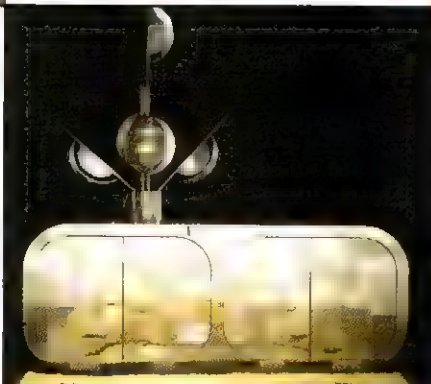
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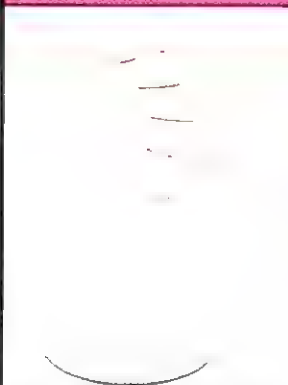
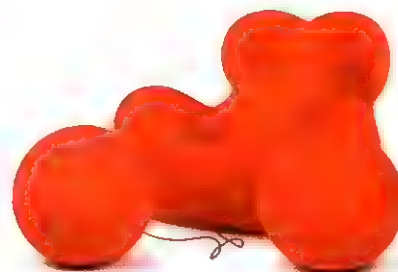
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# AT HOME WITH FREY

By Janice Lyle  
Photography by Jodie Prohl

Today, architect Albert Frey's reputation as a modern master is so well established that it is astounding to realize that for much of his career, he was known simply as a local architect in Palm Springs, California. After moving to the West Coast from New York where he designed the experimental Aluminaire House in 1931 with A. Lawrence Kocher [See *Modernism* Vol. 10, No. 2], the Swiss-born Frey (1903–98) worked in relative obscurity for more than 50 years until the 1990s, when a major traveling exhibition, originated by the University Art Museum at the University of California Santa Barbara, and an authoritative book by Joseph Rosa brought his work to the attention of a broader public. Frey's Tramway Gas Station in Palm Springs came to be seen as a symbol of 1960s exuberance, and his last home, Frey House II, one of two he built for himself in Palm Springs, was lauded as the quintessential modern integration of architecture and landscape.

Frey basked in the light of this new recognition and wanted to ensure that at least one of his buildings remain unchanged in perpetuity. Because his first home had been remodeled beyond recognition by subsequent owners, Frey came to the conclusion that giving his second home, completed in 1964, to the Palm Springs Art Museum would achieve his goal. He included in his will his desire that someone knowledgeable about his architecture live in the house and give tours to architects and students.

I was the museum's executive director in 1998 when it inherited Frey House II. At that time, we really didn't know whom we could trust to live in it. The house is essentially a single room containing living, dining and sleeping areas in 512 square feet and is distinguished by a giant boulder that juts through the glass wall next to the bed, connecting the rocky terrain with the interior.

A galley kitchen, a bathroom with a built-in closet and a utility area comprise an additional 320 square feet. After much consideration, the museum decided that the guest room (added to the original house in 1972) could be used as office space for a museum staff member, as having someone live in the house did not seem workable. Tours were given to architects and architectural students, as Frey desired.

By 2004, however, the house was beginning to look forlorn. Without someone inhabiting it full time, it seemed to lose some of its personality. When the curator whose office was in the house retired, we began to explore better solutions for its future and to consider whether my husband, Michael Boyer, and I could live there. Our children were grown, and we could entertain the idea of residing in 1,000 square feet. We had always been interested in

historic preservation, and the opportunity to contribute so intimately to the conservation of such an important house was exciting to us. We decided that we were willing to take on the responsibility of caring for this iconic structure and refraining from having any personal impact on it — that we were ready for an experiment in minimalist living.

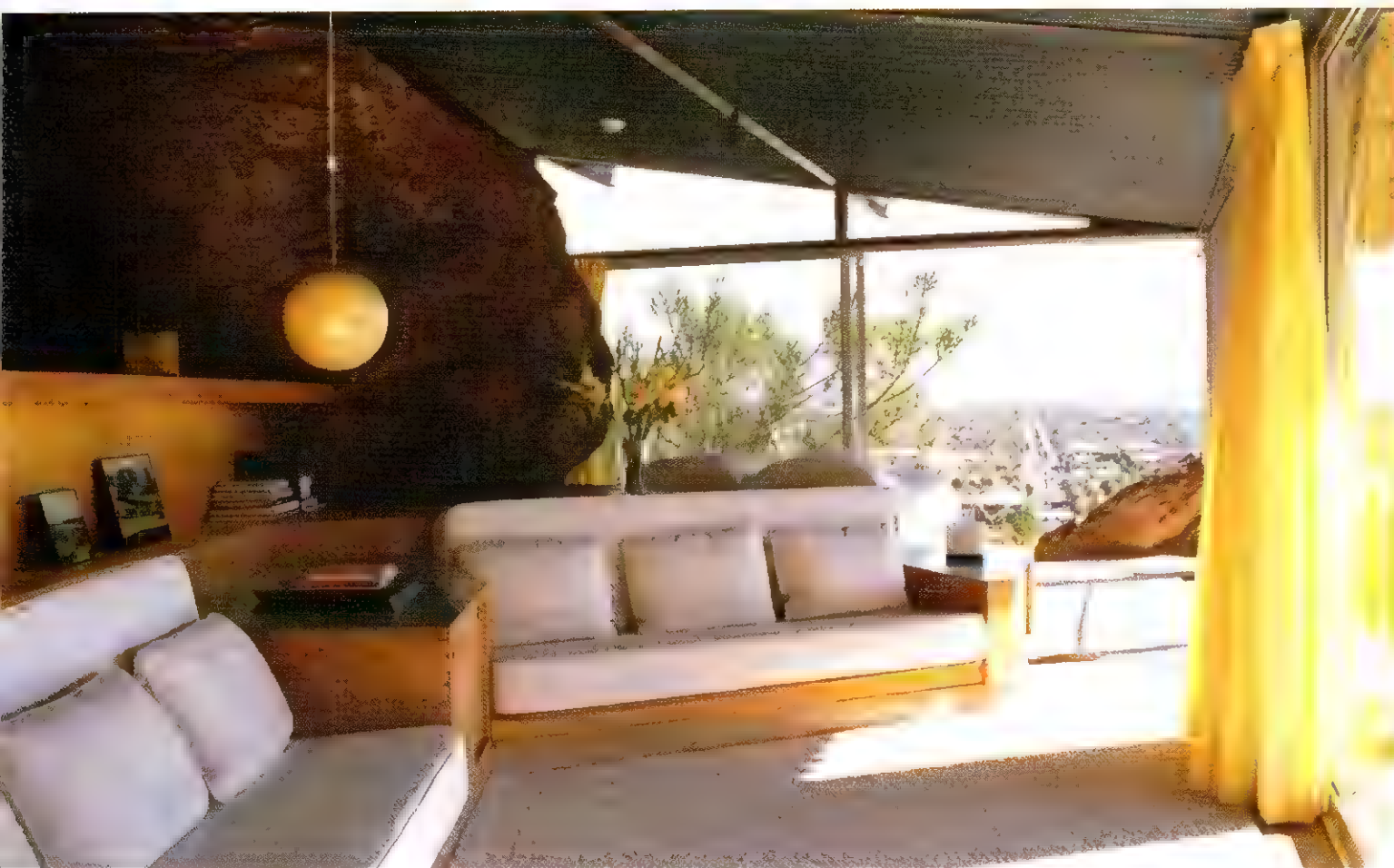
The museum's board of trustees added the responsibility of caretaker to my job description, and Michael and I moved into Frey House II in October 2004. Because the condition of the original materials was so poor (fabrics crumbled in your fingers) and because many of Frey's personal items had been bequeathed to his friends, treating the house as an historic house museum didn't seem possible. The museum decided that the best way to combine a lived-in house with an authentic experience of the architecture



**Above** Frey House II, nestled into a hillside above Palm Springs, was designed by Albert Frey as his own residence in 1964. Author Janice Lyle lived there with her husband for two and a half years while she served as director of the Palm Springs Art Museum.

**Above, right** The boulder projecting into the house literally brings the outside in.







was to recreate the interior as it was in 1964, when the house was first completed and documented by Julius Shulman's photographs.

We donated funds to the museum to have new carpets fabricated from Frey's specifications and original carpet samples. We took the original sofa cushions to be replicated and had slipcovers made to match the early drawings. These additions made the house look fresher. Then we arranged our books, decorative items and flowers to mimic those in Shulman's early photographs. Only two of the four original rope and aluminum dining chairs remained in the house when Frey died, but eventually the missing chairs were discovered in the home of Frey's friend Myrna Elysse Wolfe and purchased by the museum.

During the two and a half years that we occupied the house, we gave countless tours to everyone from the director of the National Gallery of Australia to Japanese and European architects exploring modernist architecture throughout the United States, East Coast professors trying to understand desert building, curious young architects and architecture students and the general public during the annual Modernism Week in Palm Springs [see *Modern Times* p. 28]. It was always rewarding to share our knowledge of Albert Frey with them.

My husband grew up in Palm Springs and as a child played near Frey House I (built between 1941 and 1953) — known as the "space-ship" house to neighborhood children. Because he knew Frey for almost 40 years and I knew him for 20, we were able to talk about Frey the man as well as Frey the architect. One of our favorite memories was of visiting Frey about two weeks before he died. He greeted us at the door dressed in a favorite pale yellow shirt and cream slacks with a jaunty hat in his hand. Jennifer Golub's *Albert Frey Houses 1 & 2* had just been published, and he had offered to sign a copy. He sat with us on the sofas and reminisced about the interviews for the book and his pleasure in the resulting publication. His sweet smile reflected the great joy he felt at this recognition, but his usual self-effacing manner led to modest comments.

And what was it like to live there? We thought it would be special, but it turned out to be extraordinary. Because Frey House II is integrated into the mountain, there was a seamless quality between inside and out. There were days when the wind made us feel that we were camping in the middle of the desert in a remote and private spot, with the forces of nature all around us. Once during a storm, we were awakened by booming claps of thunder and flashes of lightning. Being inside the highest structure on the mountain — made of glass with a metal roof — during a tremendous storm was exciting indeed! The curtains stop short of the ceiling, so we were always aware of the natural light in the sky. Usually it was the sun that woke us as it shone directly on the bed in the morning, but that night it was the wild and constant lightning that kept us company.

**Opposite, top** The house has one main room with subtly mapped areas for living, sleeping and, on an elevated platform, dining.

**Opposite, bottom** The city dominates the view from the living area towards the sleeping area, which is delineated by the built-in sofa and cabinet.

**Right, top and bottom** The simple materials — corrugated metal, glass and steel — inject an industrial element into the boulder-strewn landscape.







To Michael, the house was like a well-designed sailboat. The sofas, the table, the bed and — one of his favorite surprises — a hidden safe next to the boulder are all thoughtfully built in. He also appreciated the wildlife that can be observed from the house. Lizards, ground squirrels, hummingbirds and a fabulous red-tailed hawk all live in close proximity. Of course, the scorpions that stung both of us were not as well loved.

One of my greatest discoveries was the way living there changed my desire to own things. When we moved into Frey House II, we sold our own home and everything that we weren't emotionally attached to, putting our remaining books, art, collectibles, tools and a very few pieces of furniture in storage. While living in the house, I would see something that was wonderful and admire it, but didn't have an overwhelming desire to acquire it. Where would it go?

There are people who ask if living in such a small space put much strain on my relationship with my husband. Actually, it worked very well for us because we never felt confined. The walls of glass allowed an expansiveness of spirit and space. Only once did we look at each other and say, 'You go stay at that end of the house and I'll stay at this one!'

Being a museum director is very hectic, and it was wonderfully serene to come home and feel that I was removed from the frenetic daily pace of work. Watching the colors change on the mountains at sunset was a particularly calming experience. We felt an incredible sense of peace as we followed the pinks, purples and browns moving with the light across the mountains. We could hear

traffic and smell barbecuing steak and we could see the city of Palm Springs in the distance, but we felt separate, slower than the rest of the world and enormously lucky to feast on the unbelievable view from both inside and outside the house. I would watch as visitors to Frey House II emerged from their cars and got their first glimpse of the house and the view. I was often reminded of how that first look left me breathless, a feeling that remained as long as I lived there.

In April 2007, I left my position as executive director of the museum, and Michael and I gave up our role as caretakers of the house. We have moved to a nearby mountain community where the landscape is equally beautiful, and we are taking our minimalist experience with us. We are building a home inspired by mid-century modern style with elements derived from Frey House II: the metal shed roof, glass wall, industrial materials and the human scale are all part of our new aesthetic adventure. Albert Frey's influence on our lives continues. ■

*The former executive director of the Palm Springs Art Museum, **Janice Lyle** has been involved in preservation efforts since the 1980s. A founding board member of the Palm Springs Preservation Foundation, she was also chair of the Historic Site Preservation Board for the City of Palm Springs and was instrumental in launching the Architecture and Design Council of the Palm Springs Art Museum.*





**Opposite** The dining area provides a stunning view of the city below. The chairs were later replaced by the four original rope and aluminum chairs designed by Frey.

**Above** The author relaxes with the newspaper while her husband, Michael Boyer, works at his computer. Living in such small quarters was not difficult, she remembers, since the house was open to such expansive views. The entrance to the bathroom is through the open doorway.

**Right** A cooling dip in the swimming pool was welcome on a 110 degree summer day.







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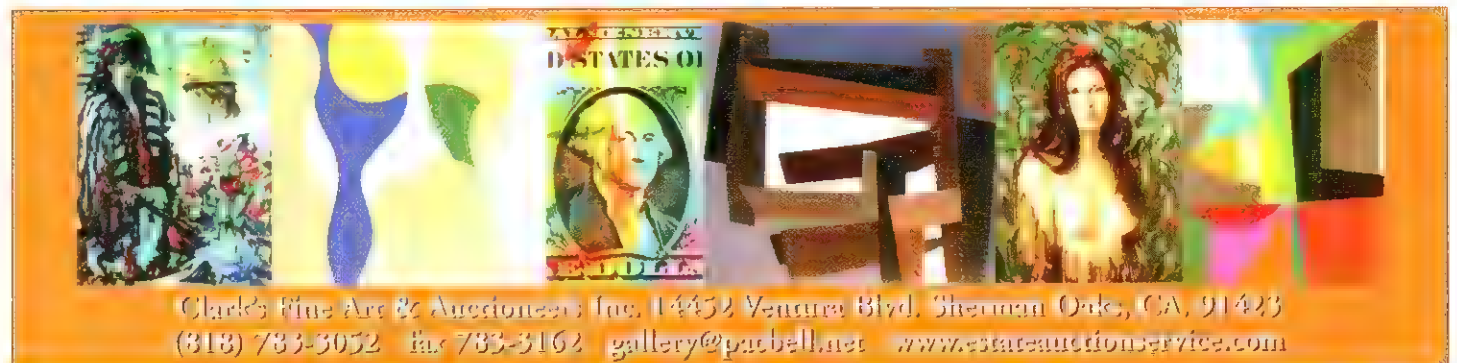


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## DESIGNING RAYMOND LOEWY

# ELIZABETH REESE REMEMBERED

By Jake Gorst

Raymond Loewy, who has long been touted as the “Father of Industrial Design,” was a charming fellow with a good eye who communicated his ideas effectively. The work produced in his offices from sewing needles to electric shavers, found its way into every American home. But Loewy would likely never have accomplished so much without the work of a beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed publicist named Elizabeth Reese — Betty for short.

I was honored to know Betty through my grandfather, architect Andrew Geller, who joined the design firm of Raymond Loewy Associates in 1947. He later went on to design four vacation homes for Betty on Long Island, the first of which (an A-frame built in 1955)

received great amounts of publicity thanks to Betty, igniting my grandfather's career and spawning innumerable copies.

One cold, rainy day in March of 2000, I took a drive with my grandfather, sister and small daughter to New Rochelle, Connecticut, to see Betty, who was ill and living in a nursing home. When we arrived, she was sitting in a wheelchair reading a book. Her face was drawn and pale, but still beautiful. She looked up, focused on us and smiled brightly. As we wheeled her to her room, Betty looked up at my grandfather and said, “You are my oldest friend.” A photograph among the many in her room caught my eye; it showed Betty in her thirties, posing on the beach at Sagaponack, New York, next to her

**Above** Betty Reese and Raymond Loewy in the back seat of Loewy's new custom-built Lincoln Town Car 1946.

jeep. "We were so young then," she said. "We sure had fun."

Fun" characterized most of Betty's working life. Before attending Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University, she traveled with a dance troupe, and, after a brief marriage in the mid 1930s, she became a puppeteer. Eventually she found her way to New York, where she worked at the 1939 World's Fair. It was here that she first heard of Loewy, who developed many attractions at the fair, including Chrysler Motors' "Vision of the Future" display, complete with space-age automobiles and a rocketport. She decided she would work for Loewy, and applied for the position of publicist in 1940. "The first time I met Loewy was at my job interview," she recalled in 1986. "He asked me if I could write and I answered that I'd be a damned fool to try for this job if I couldn't. He liked that." If Loewy was impressed with Betty, she was equally so with him, considering him the epitome of refinement.

Loewy's first request to her was to get his face on the cover of *Time* magazine. Eight years later, she succeeded. The daughter of a newspaperman, Betty had learned many tricks of the trade early on. She instructed Loewy always to stand to the right of the person being photographed with him, so that when the pictures made their way into print, Loewy's name would appear first in the caption. Before meetings, Loewy would consult with Betty, asking what the other parties knew. "I would tell him what to say and then he would do exactly as I had told him," Betty later recalled. "I had the perfect showman to direct. He had an unerring genius for timing and presentation."

In 1947, Betty shipped dozens of samples of Loewy-designed products, including the Dole Coca-Cola Dispenser, the Coldspot Super 6 refrigerator, a Studebaker automobile and a Hallicrafter radio to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to be photographed in front of two large Loewy-designed locomotives. The widely published photographs succinctly presented the broad scope of Loewy's work for the first time. Here was a design empire, in stark black and white.

In the early 1950s, Betty intensified her efforts to make Raymond Loewy a household name, arranging for his face to appear in his clients' advertising. Loewy endorsed cookies for Nabisco, cellophane for the Olin Mathieson Chemical Corporation and watches for Rolex. At Betty's direction, manufacturers bragged that "world famous industrial designer Raymond Loewy" had developed their products. Loewy was also a guest on Edward R. Murrow's television entertainment news program *Person to Person*, broadcast by CBS. In a sequence that Betty orchestrated, Loewy wanders through what he calls the "room of horrors," full of gaudy products from the 1920s. Betty and Loewy stand next to a bronze clock whose face is obscured by several naked cherubs. "How do you dust this thing?" asks Betty. She then bends over and blows on the clock, coating Loewy's hand-tailored suit with a heavy layer of white dust. The point was obvious: Loewy's streamline design approach would make the housewife's life easier. The public got it; such publicity tactics helped catapult Loewy's simple, clean design into the mainstream.

Betty was also instrumental in the development and naming of many products. She once recalled a meeting she had with Loewy and rug manufacturer Edward Fields. The post-war era found young urban families moving from small apartments to larger homes in the suburbs. Interested in modern design, as well as cost



Collection of Richard Moss



Collection of Richard Moss

**Top** Reese gives instructions to engineers inside a Loewy-designed GG1 Locomotive during a product photo shoot in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1947.

**Above** Reese enjoys a day at the beach with a friend at Fire Island, New York, c. 1940.





**Top, left** Reese on the deck of her A-frame house, designed by Andrew Geller, in Sagaponack, New York, 1955.

**Top, right** Dacron advertisement from 1956 featuring a model of Reese's Sagaponack house.

**Above** Loewy product photo shoot, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1947. Included were the GG1 Locomotive (1934), the Coldspot Refrigerator (1935), the Farmall Tractor (1939), the 1947 Studebaker Commander and the Hallicrafter SX-42 Radio (1946).

conscious, they sought alternatives to expensive wall-to-wall carpeting. Fields developed a range of moderately priced small rugs featuring modern design patterns developed by Loewy that could fit in virtually any space. The subject of the meeting was: "What do we call these things?" Betty suggested that, because they only covered a small area they should be called "area rugs." The term was universally adopted.

At times, Betty's professional and personal lives became blurred. She was well known for organizing extravagant office parties with plays and talent revues—the drafting rooms converted to nightclubs. Parties at the Loewy offices became well known in the business world, with high-powered executives lobbying for invitations. Betty also held parties at her New York apartment and her summer beach house attended by celebrities of all types: musicians, designers and movie and TV actors, such as Eartha Kitt, George Nelson, David Wayne and Robert Mitchum. Her talent for orchestrating excitement was legendary. When she wasn't entertaining, she could be found fly-fishing or hand-bleaching her house.

Many of her publicity ploys seemed subtle at the time but were significant in the context of popular consumer culture of the 1950s and '60s. The September 21, 1959 issue of *Life* magazine featured an article on the wives of NASA's first seven astronauts in the Mercury space program. Page 68 featured an advertisement, conceived by Betty and designed by the Loewy office, for Dupont's new polyester fiber "Dacron." Two young professional men were pictured wearing sporty Dacron jackets and pants and silk ties studying a model of Betty's Geller-designed A-frame beach house. Translation: You've grown up, you're a professional, this modern beach house is cool and you're cool, too!

In spite of all her social connections, Betty remained single and never had children, although she relished playing with the wildest of them. The beach was her favorite playground. She used to chase my mother through the surf and taught my uncle Gregg to drive her jeep on the beach when he was only seven years old. I can remember grooving to Billy Joel records with Betty at her summer house when I was a young teenager in the early '80s.

That cold March morning was the last time I ever saw Betty. Throughout her life, she rarely drew attention to herself and her death on April 17, 2000, passed virtually unnoticed. She was content to use her talents to springboard the careers of her employer and her friends. But without her, Loewy's influence might not have been so enormous and our world might look and work very differently. ■

**Jake Gorst** is an Emmy award winning documentary filmmaker, historian and architectural preservationist. Recent films include *Leisurama* and *Desert Utopia: Mid-Century Architecture in Palm Springs*. His last article for *Modernism* was "Modeled in Metal: The Aluminaire House" (Vol. 10, No. 2).

**Top, right** Reese and Loewy executive William Snaith dance and sing during a performance of *Arizona*, a musical written and performed by the Loewy staff at a Christmas party in the late 1940s.

**Right** Reese wheels Loewy-designed products to the Harrisburg photo shoot, 1947.

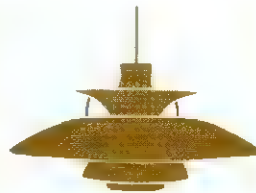




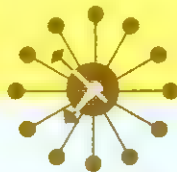


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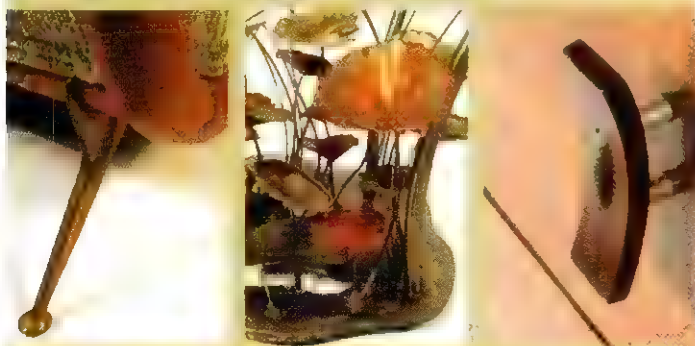
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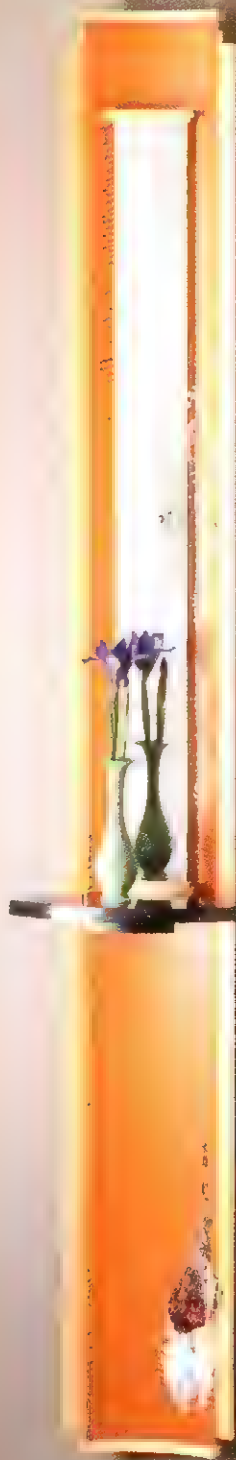
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Photo by Robert Wenkam

# Hawaiian Modern

## VLADIMIR OSSIPOFF IN NEW TERRITORY

By Dean Sakamoto and Karla Britton



Photo by Robert Wenkam

In a career that spanned more than 60 years and was based exclusively in Hawai'i, architect Vladimir Ossipoff (1907–98) witnessed the islands' startling transformation from an isolated agrarian territory to the fiftieth state in the Union. His career paralleled Hawai'i's developing prominence as a center of American military power and, with the rise of jet travel, its growing magnetic appeal for international tourism. Russian by birth, raised in Japan and educated in California, Ossipoff demonstrated multivalent talents as a modern architect and was celebrated during his lifetime within the islands as a masterful, cosmopolitan and versatile interpreter of Hawaiian life. His residences provided a model for a particularly gracious style of living in Hawai'i, and his schools, chapels, office buildings, apartment towers, clubs and airports received coverage in publications nationally and abroad.

Ossipoff's career fits within the context of innovative architectural thinking and practice that developed in the mid 20th century in numerous tropical and subtropical regions. Following World War II, architects in the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, Southeast Asia and elsewhere sought a contemporary indigenous architecture that would synthesize new technologies with an understanding of regional culture and local climate and topography.

**Above** Ossipoff photographed in the 1970s.

**Above, top** Of Vladimir Ossipoff's many residences, his Blanche Hill House (1961) in Kahala, Honolulu, embodies most fully his regional modernist style that drew on the ancient Hawaiian open air room or *lanai*, as well as traditional Japanese design. The guest wing is to the left; the lanai-living wing at center.

**Opposite** The perimeter of the lanai at the Blanche Hill House, with the wood shutters in their open position.



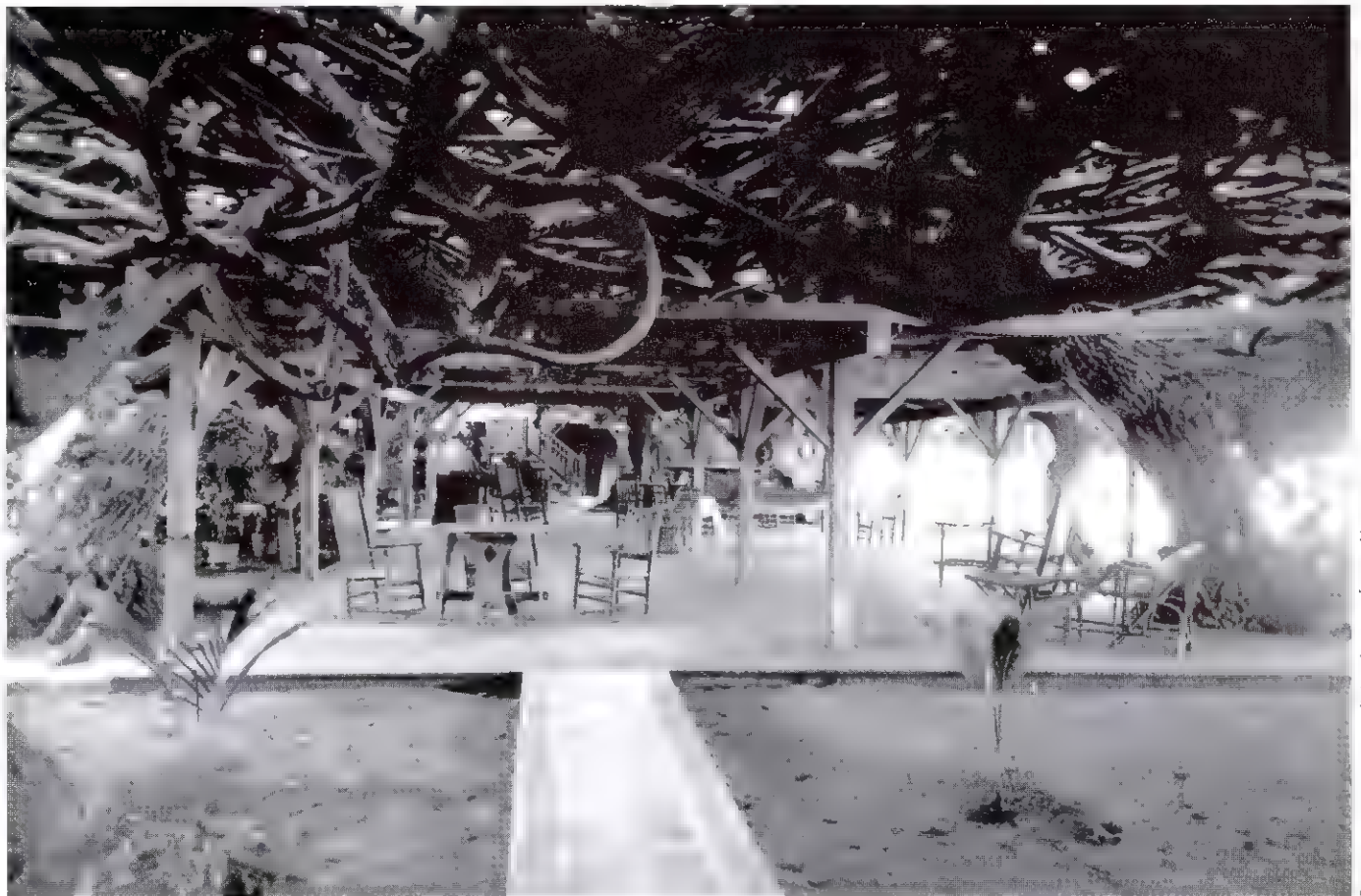
Photo by Francis Haer





Photo by P. de Vries

These included Geoffrey Bawa and Minette de Silva in Sri Lanka, the German architect Henry Klumb in Puerto Rico [see *Modernism* Vol. 9, No. 2]; and Ricardo Porro in Cuba. Notable structures of this movement include Richard Neutra's 1964 Schultess House in Havana integrated into its site with the aid of the Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx; the Cocoon House, with its light timber frame, in Sarasota, Florida, designed in 1948 by the young Paul Rudolph and Ralph Twitchell; and Juan O'Gorman's National Library at the National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, built in 1953. This younger generation of modern designers who came to the fore in the 1950s — which also included Marcel Breuer in the Northeast, Rudolph and other members of the Sarasota School in Florida, Pietro Belluschi in the Pacific Northwest, Neutra and Craig Elwood in Southern California and William Wurster and other adherents of the Bay Area School in Northern California — often subscribed to the general modernity of the International Style while significantly challenging the idea of modern architecture as an artificially imposed and regimented style devoid of local sensibilities. They drew on Frank Lloyd Wright's concern for integrating buildings into their sites, and they invariably made an effort to forge a link between the interior and exterior of their structures. Within this panorama, Ossipoff's work stands out for the particular integrity of his design and the breadth of his efforts. His architecture remains a benchmark for Hawaiian design: for the integrity of its execution, its unostentatious and human scale, its integration into the landscape and skilled framing of vistas, its manipulation of patterns of light and



Photograph by Kory de Vries, de Vries Museum



**Above** The airy Blanche Hill lanai, with its weatherproof terrazzo floor floating on hidden supports, its cantilevered roof and minimal walls is Ossipoff's most fully realized modern incarnation of the traditional lanai.

**Opposite, top** In the Blanche Hill House, Ossipoff provided flexible options for closure or openness, including parallel sliding or bifolding panels of wood louvers, screen and glass

**Opposite, bottom** The traditional lanai was an outdoor room formed by an open-sided post-and-beam wood frame with a roof of thatch or dried leaves that provided shelter from both sun and rain. The famous Hau Tree Lanai at the Halekulani Hotel, at Waikiki Beach, Honolulu (photographed in 1925), shows a common variation used along the island shores: a living canopy formed by the indigenous hau vine.

shadow and its focus on the resources provided by cooling winds and the conditions of individual microclimates

Preceding Ossipoff in Hawai'i in the 1920s, prominent architects from the mainland became involved with Honolulu including the New York-based Bertram Goodhue, the Bostonian Ralph Adams Cram and the Californian Julia Morgan, and addressed the question of how best to build in the Hawaiian Islands. Architect Minoru Yamasaki, whose Queen Emma Gardens were built in 1964 remarked in 1963 that the city of Honolulu "could be, with its

incomparable setting and climate, the most beautiful city in the world." Indeed, Honolulu often struck architects as having the potential to offer alternative architectural solutions to mainstream practice given the limits and promises of its unique geography

Ossipoff strongly shared this vision for Honolulu. In the mid 1960s, his reputation was broadened beyond his own works by the role he assumed as an activist against the rampant development of mediocre building in the city. Together with a number of his colleagues, he took an environmental design agenda to the



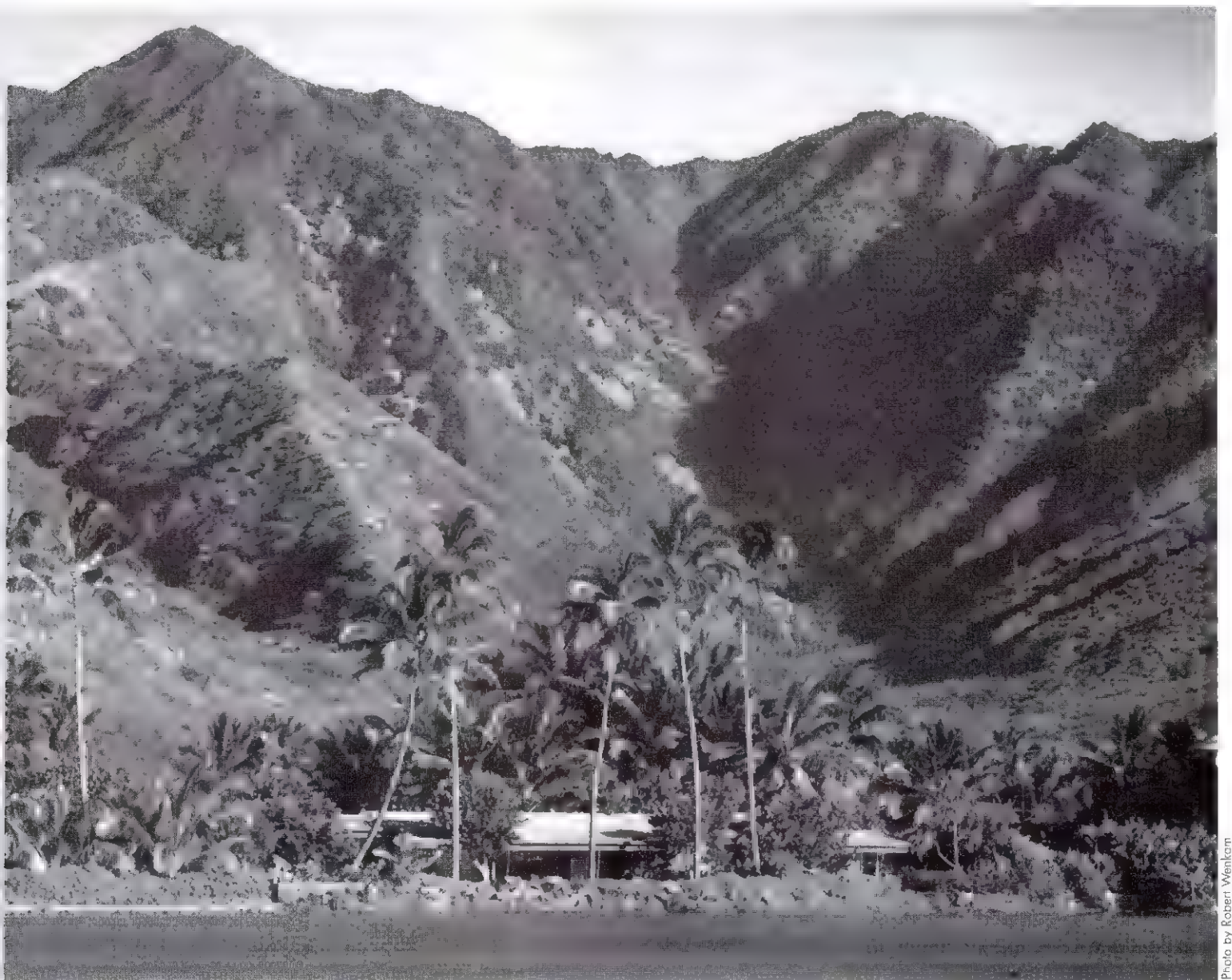


Photo by Robert Wenkam

**Above and opposite** The two-bedroom house Ossipoff designed for his family in 1957 on Paiko Lagoon O'ahu with its breathtaking view of the lagoon and the Pacific Ocean from the living area, was ideal for both daily life and the casual yet tasteful entertaining for which the architect and his wife, Lyn, were known. By concealing the header beams above the full-height sliding glass doors on the ocean side of the dining and living areas (opposite, bottom), Ossipoff was able to extend the ceiling into an extreme yet graceful overhang that sheltered half the living room and the attached oceanfront lanai from the strong afternoon sun and occasional storms. The minimal vertical support enhances the effect of a floating plane attached at its central axis – recalling Ossipoff's notion that the umbrella was the ideal model for a Hawaiian house. The bleached redwood boards of the ceiling are spaced one inch apart, exposing a dark-colored fiberboard, which directs the eye along the length of the interior. Other materials used throughout the house include painted concrete block, teak and clay floor tile. The unobtrusive structure set amidst dense flora, is equally discrete inside with its entry through a dimly lit, low-ceilinged linear gallery with direct access to the bedrooms and study and to the living room, whose high ceiling draws one forward into the public realm of the house. It was selected as one of *Architectural Record's* 20 Record Houses of 1960 and featured in *Sunset* magazine in 1963.

press and the political arena. As president-elect of the Hawai'i Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in 1964–65, Ossipoff declared a highly publicized "War on Ugliness" as a means of calling attention to the rapid commercialization of the Waikiki waterfront. As part of this initiative, Ossipoff and his AIA colleagues supported a controversial plan to drastically restrict future development in the Waikiki resort district, where zoning restrictions were minimal.

Ossipoff designed many well-received public and commercial buildings, notably the Honolulu International Airport and the Outrigger Canoe Club, but his residential work provides a good opportunity to observe his development of a regional style. An architect from Ceylon once said that in his country the ideal house is an 'umbrella' which protects the







**Above** View of Nānākuli Valley in 2006 from the Ossipoff Cottage, a weekend retreat that Ossipoff built for his family in 1954 on a ridge more than 2,000 feet high in the Wai'anāe Mountains, overlooking western O'ahu

dweller from both sun and rain," Ossipoff said in 1977, referring to Geoffrey Bawa. "This is a distillation of an idea to its simplest expression, and I like it. A house in Hawai'i would do well to observe this simple dictum." The concept evokes the minimal protection needed to shelter a Hawaiian home from the elements while integrating it with its surroundings, a balancing act that Ossipoff mastered as his practice matured. He demonstrated that the ideal island home is understated and emphasizes its connection to the environment through topographic integration and carefully considered views; responsiveness to microclimate; ease of passage between inside and out, and the unveiling of the site through movement. Inscribed within this experience of a house and its setting is an element of surprise: pathways to entries are never direct but create moments of delight both simple and grand, often framing views beyond. By midcentury, Ossipoff's firm belief that a dwelling should be shaped by climate and site produced remarkably sensitive homes that established a foundation for the significant work he completed in the following decades.

Fundamental to Ossipoff's environmental design approach is the implementation of proper building orientation, protective architectural elements and his understanding of island microclimates, which are surprisingly varied and can be decisive factors in the shape and openness of a dwelling. Most of the islands are divided

by mountain ranges which create distinct windward and leeward climate zones. Trade winds bring windy and wet conditions to windward inland areas, as well as breezy and salty shorelines, while leeward districts are drier and warmer. In all the zones, however, daytime temperature remains within the range of 70 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit.

Ossipoff manipulated functional spaces to confront these different climatic conditions, using interior areas that require a greater degree of enclosure, such as bedrooms and service spaces, as buffers from prevailing winds. Two basic architectural elements typically resolved the conflict between openness and views and privacy, as well as permeability to and protection from the natural elements. The first is the broad eave overhang. The second is the sill vent, a projecting bay with a fixed glazed window; the underside of the bay is left open and outfitted with louvers and a screen to admit the breeze but not the rain.

Ossipoff also sought to minimize his buildings' scale, preferring to compartmentalize the plan into distinct, spatially efficient wings. He often integrated exterior space into the house's array of functions rather than fitting a complex program in one large volume.

The restrained elegance of Ossipoff's houses lies in his creative accommodation of clients' tastes and his enhancement of everyday functions. Over the years Ossipoff honed his ability to read clients



and respond architecturally in surprising ways. With an exceptional degree of self-assurance, Ossipoff was known to tell clients, "You will like it when you see it" and "Let me do it for you." His solutions to practical problems — especially in kitchens, bathrooms, service areas and cabinetry — included thoughtful details that complemented the overall grace of a structure and made everyday household tasks joyful and efficient. Ossipoff's wife, Lyn, assured clients such as John and Patty Dilks, who commissioned a house in the 1970s that "every house he does matches its people."

One of Ossipoff's most significant and successful architectural contributions was his transformation of the traditional Hawaiian lanai, a structure that he and his colleagues identified as the primary spatial and cultural element that distinguished Hawaiian architecture. Although other architects incorporated the lanai into their designs, Ossipoff's firm developed it until it was recognized as a nearly perfected building type of its own.

As it was originally conceived by native Hawaiians for daily living, social gatherings and spiritual ceremonies — all of which took place outdoors — the lanai was a freestanding, open-sided, post-and-beam wood frame with a roof of thatch or dried leaves. This rudimentary shelter remains prevalent along island shores, especially where the

thick and sinuous hau, an indigenous climbing plant, provides a living canopy that usually outlives its supporting timber structure. Early Western settlers adapted the model to serve as an extension to supplement the interior space of houses and buildings, protected from the rain, but open to the breeze. This updated lanai is essentially a large veranda. While Ossipoff often employed this later configuration, his reinterpretation of the original lanai form — the incorporation of modern architectural functions, aesthetics and materials into the ancient minimal framework that had been shaped by the climactic logic of the islands — was perhaps his finest innovation.

For island image makers, too, the lanai was central to Hawai'i's modern architectural identity. From the 1950s onward, architects, journalists and institutions seeking to popularize the virtues of island life pointed to the lanai as proof of modern Hawai'i's culture of gracious indoor-outdoor living, possible only in such idyllic conditions. The novelty of this design and usage was highlighted two decades later in an article on an Ossipoff house in the September 1976 issue of *Sunset* magazine. The cover line over a photograph of an Ossipoff-designed lanai reads: "Hawai'i's Lanai Idea — The Room with the Missing Wall." Ossipoff did not seek to resurrect or mimic native architecture, however, nor offer up a self-conscious

**Below** A period photograph shows the lanai of the Boettcher House (1937), in Kalama, Kailua, O'ahu, Ossipoff's first significant project after he opened his own office in 1936. The U-shaped plan of the one-story structure placed the primary entry within the deep recess of the cool lanai which faces the inland courtyard, sheltered from the wind-driven rain and salt spray from the ocean. The steep double-pitched wood shake-covered roof and exposed timber rafters, which extend over the lanai, form an extremely high ceiling for the massive living room at the center of the house. The fireplace chimney of local coral stone doubles as an outdoor barbecue for the lanai. Note the rugs and furniture that define the lanai as an outdoor room.

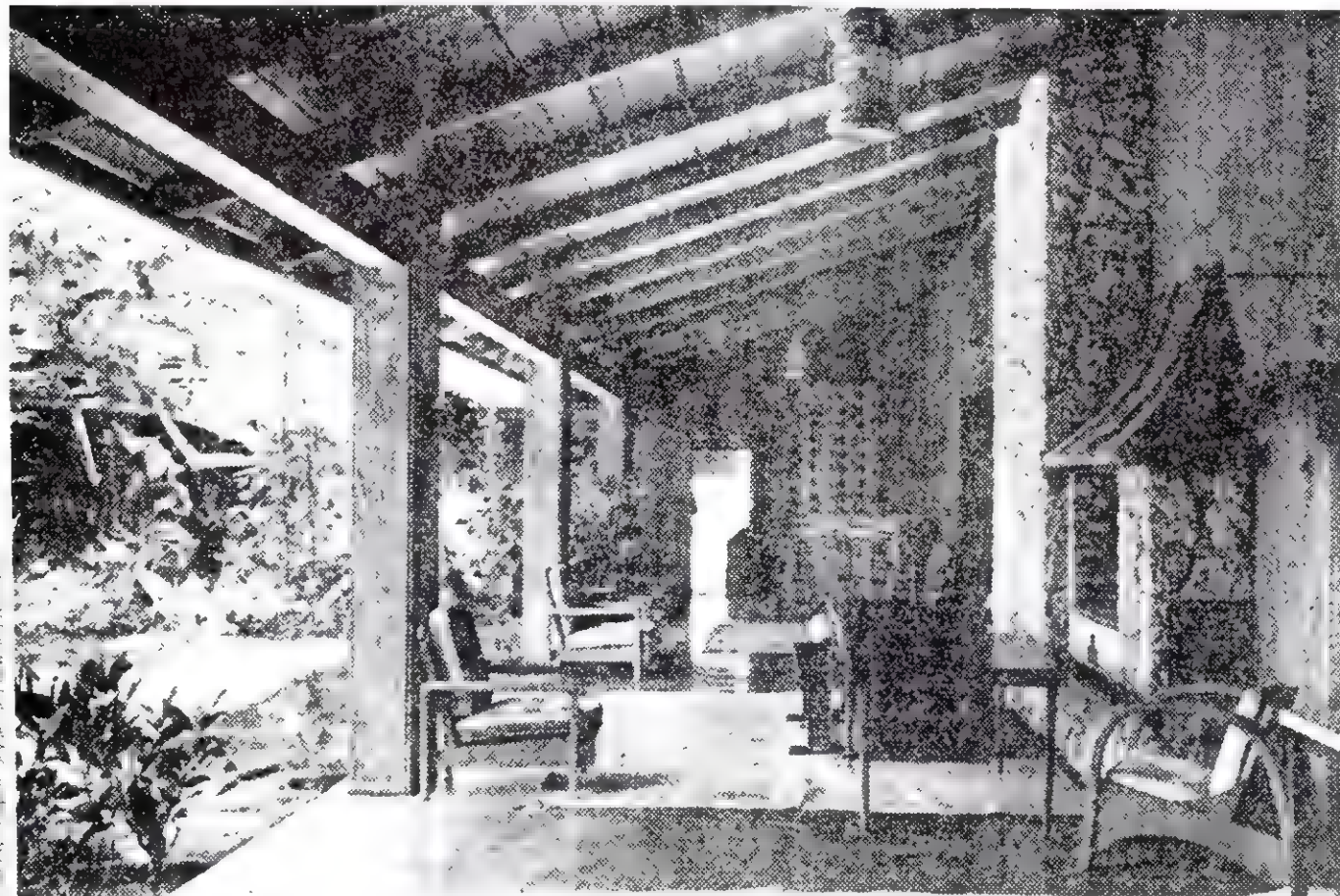


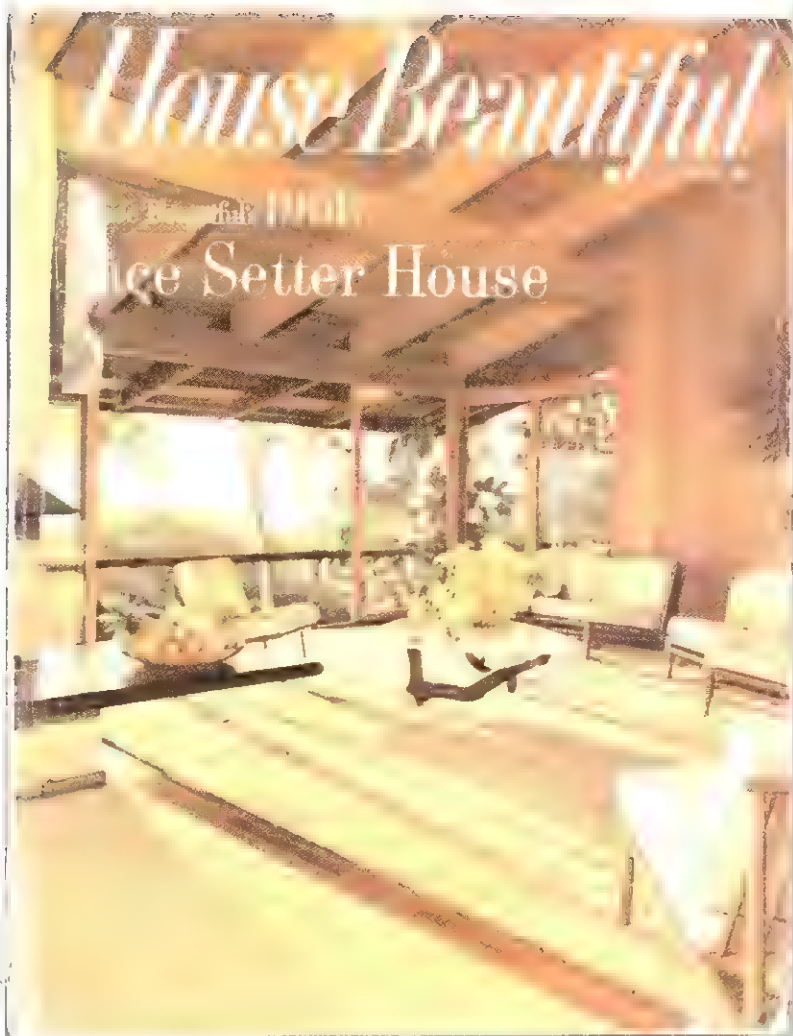




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**Left and opposite** The Liljestrand House (1952) in Makiki Heights, Honolulu, is perched on two landscaped terraces on a ridge nearly 1,000 feet above sea level, with magnificent views to the east and west. Ossipoff's design had to contend with widely varied weather conditions, which veer from sunny to rainy to windy in the course of a single day, and the building is configured to be both protected and naturally ventilated. The one-room wide house is a series of distinct spaces, each served by a lanai. Cooling trade winds enter through adjustable wood louvers underneath the windows on the windward side and are drawn out through larger openings on the leeward side. Deep overhangs and carefully positioned interior partitions achieve a combination of filtered daylight and shade, while expansive sliding glass windows open the living room to the sky, creating the effect of being in the treetops. A deck off the living room (opposite top) juts out toward a pool on a third terrace below. Contrasting textures are used to great effect, including smooth redwood walls, bleach-stained to accentuate the grain; a sandstone fireplace with a copper hood; and countertops, kitchen table and stair treads made from the hardy wood of a felled monkeypod tree recuperated by the client. The furnishings were custom made by Ansteth Ltd., a local decorating firm and outfitted with textured fabrics. A low Lucite table (left) designed by Ossipoff, is paired with a handsome guava branch that the client harvested from the property. The project garnered international recognition in 1958 upon its publication as the coveted *House Beautiful* magazine Pace Setter House

theoretical invention. His design grew out of problem solving that responded to his architectural programs and climatic conditions, and drew on local architectural precedents that he believed had stood the test of time. In addition, perhaps because of his upbringing in Japan, Ossipoff also brought the perspective of another culture whose vernacular architecture demonstrates a persistent and integral relationship to nature. Having grown up in a traditional Japanese house, he knew firsthand what worked, what did not and how Hawai'i's climate could be advantageous to Japanese domestic traditions.

In a 1986 article in *Hawai'i Architect*, he noted that the Japanese house's layered enclosure is ideal for Hawai'i's warm year-round climate, while useful only during Japan's warmer seasons and ineffective against its cold winter weather. He also mentioned the *engawa*, or veranda platform, a key component of the Japanese house that functions much like the Hawaiian lanai. It typically circumscribed the interior courtyards and exterior perimeter of larger domestic structures and functioned at once as a passageway and a place for indoor-outdoor activities. Ossipoff also described the layers of sliding panels — *shoji* (paper and wood screen) and *amado* (wood shutters) — that open and close the *engawa* to nature. Clearly, the traditional Japanese house was structured for its inhabitants to dwell with nature rather than resist it; Ossipoff innately understood this attitude and transferred these

elements to Hawai'i, with its hospitable climate and tradition of making buildings that are essentially part of nature. In Ossipoff's hands, a simple vernacular structure modern design principles, and two cultures' approaches to the integration of architecture and nature were combined to create a new form for contemporary Hawaiian architecture.

Ossipoff's 1961 summer home for his client Blanche Hill, with its intimate complex of modest interior volumes linked with exterior spaces, was conceptually similar to the native *hale* complex, in which living functions were segregated in separate structures, and most activity occurred outdoors, with the lanai as the primary locus of everyday life and social functions — and it could be why Ossipoff referred to the Blanche Hill residence as his "most Hawaiian house." Lightly perched on the Kāhala beachfront, the flat-roofed, open-plan house, with its spare palette of concrete, textured concrete block, wood and glass, was the most informal and open to the environment of the architect's designs. It incorporated modern design and structural techniques, such as concealed steel roof framing in the lanai and living area that eliminated the need for columns, creating exceptionally clear spans across this space. It also enabled a cantilevered roof supported only by the few painted concrete-block bearing walls that pierced the concrete slab floor from the foundation below. The floor itself floated two feet above the ground on hidden set back support columns. Concealed header





Photo by Robert Venturi

**Above and opposite** The Pauling House, Round Top Honolulu, 1957, was built for Dr. Linus Pauling, Jr. and his family. Unusual for Ossipoff, in its geometric rigor, it is at once massive and light, crude and refined, spacious and compressed inside, integrated with, yet independent of, its site. Located on a windy, rainy mountain top, the house is an elongated C-shape in plan, and more closed to the exterior than Ossipoff's other houses. He placed five bedrooms in a long row on the northwest side to create a defensive wall against the fierce, wind-driven rains, and angled the master bedroom suite and the living room out at either end to form a sheltered entrance courtyard. The basic materials palette — battered stone and concrete foundation walls, rough-sawn redwood exterior siding and bleached redwood inside, corrugated metal roofing (to collect rainwater in underground cisterns) and large expanses of glass — creates an aura of ruggedness and harmony with the surrounding wilderness. While the two bedroom wings are separated from the living area and from one another for privacy, the various functional living spaces — kitchen and dining area, foyer and living room — are open to one another, yet subtly defined by angled partitions and the ceiling treatment.

beams inside the ceiling assembly enabled extremely wide openings, fitted with floor-to-ceiling sliding or bifolding wood shutters, glass panels and screens, layered one in front of the other, that could to open the rooms completely to the outdoors. The clear space, exposed to the natural elements, its terrazzo floor tolerant of heavy rains, was lightly cupped between the hovering floor and roof planes that framed views and gave shade, creating an overall effect of delight and mystery. The house was demolished by new owners in the 1980s, who never built on the site, which remains hauntingly vacant to this day.

In 1978, Ossipoff passed on ownership of the firm he founded in 1936 to his younger partners, Sidney Snyder, Alan Rowland and Gregory Goetz. He stayed on as a consultant, completing his last project, a private house in Honolulu for a family from Japan, in 1997. The practice survives as Ossipoff, Snyder, and Rowland Architects

now the oldest architectural office in Hawai'i. Signaling the unique contribution Ossipoff made through this firm to the development of 20th-century architecture in Hawai'i, upon his death a local newspaper referred to him as "the dean of Hawaiian architects."

In the 21st century, Ossipoff's architecture symbolizes a more remote era in Hawai'i that preceded today's extensive large-scale development, increased commercial land speculation and traffic congestion, population expansion and evolving visitor industry. Honolulu is now often described as "inhospitable." One strategy for countering the generic urban face created by the proliferation of undistinguished high-rises has been to create more cohesive environments that mimic the architectural character of the Territorial style of the 1920s and 1930s. In some areas, strict development guidelines for new construction have been enforced that dictate the materials, color, ornamentation and even the

Photo by V. for a Sombunars



Photo by Robert Wanyam







Photo by Vladimir Samburov

shape and slope of roofs. This resurrection of Hawai'i's hegemonic past is not the most effective means of creating a locally significant architecture that addresses both the contemporary cultural diversity and the environmental realities of the islands

In light of the urbanistic complexities that challenge Hawai'i today, consideration of Ossipoff's richly varied designs leads one to ask: To what degree can his search for an equitable and authentic ground between the contemporary and the traditional and his example of ecological and regional sensitivities, serve today as a model for architects not just in Hawai'i but around the world? As Ossipoff's corporate projects and private residences pass their 50th anniversaries, their preservation and further critical assessment can surely contribute to the universal challenge of making architecture that is delightfully particular to its place and durable over time

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*This article was adapted from the book **Hawaiian Modern: The Architecture of Vladimir Ossipoff** (Yale University Press, 2007) that accompanies the exhibition of the same name curated by Dean Sakamoto and organized by the Honolulu Academy of Arts. The show is on view there through January 27, 2008, then travels to the Yale University School of Architecture Gallery, New Haven Connecticut (September 2 – October 24, 2008) and the Deutsches Architekturmuseum Frankfurt, Germany (February 7 – May 10, 2009).*



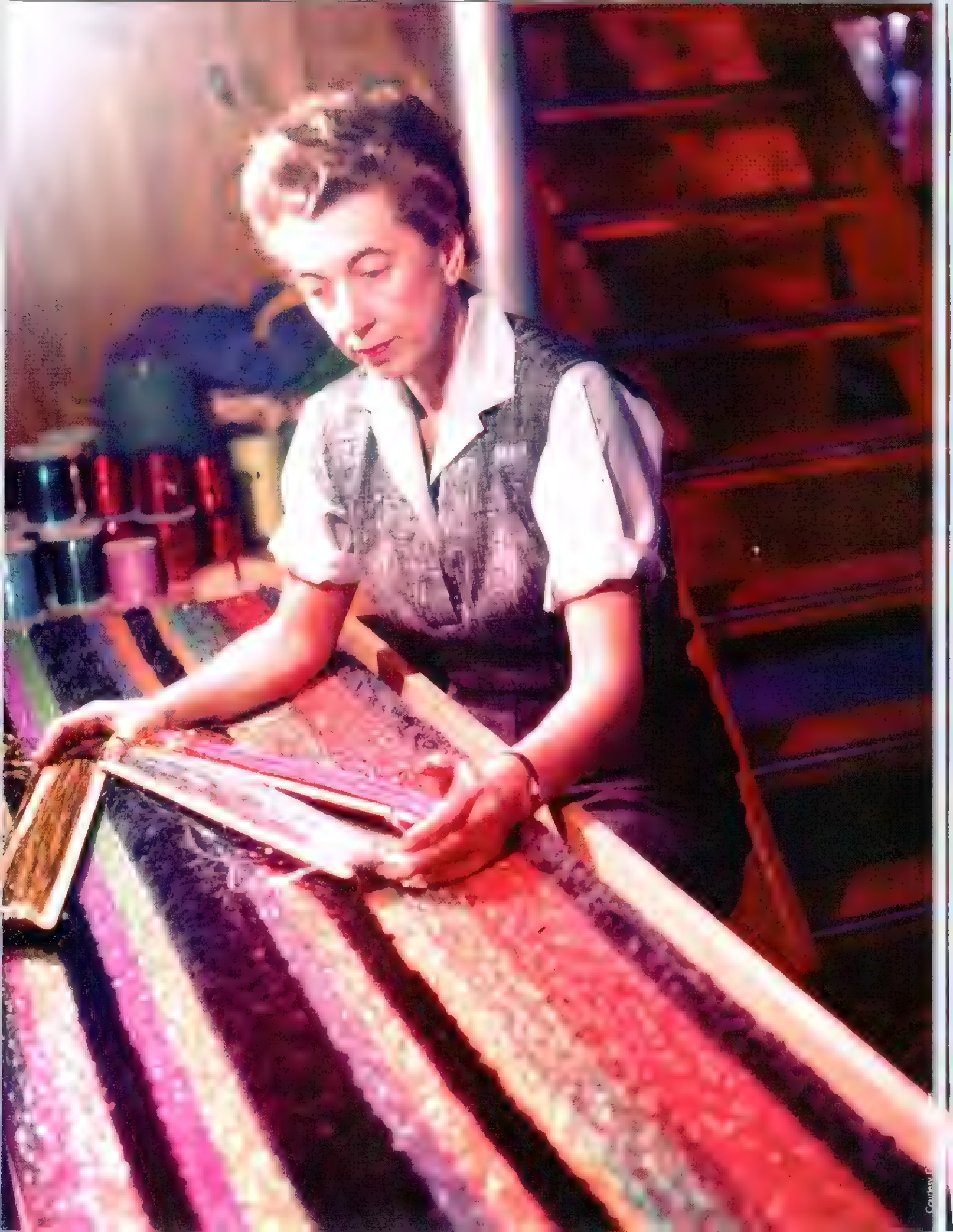
Photo by Vladimir Samburov



Photo by Robert Wansom

**Above and opposite** The Goodsill House (1952) in Wai alae, Honolulu, is in a subdivision planned by Ossipoff. The primary challenge was conforming to the small, sloping lot while accommodating an indoor-outdoor lifestyle for a young family. Because it is on the dry leeward side of the island, protection from the inland trade winds and strong sun were additional concerns. The most striking aspect of the plan is that there are no corridors, aside from a deep lanai which acts as the house's central circulation hub and social space. The lanai (opposite, top) opens onto the central courtyard; the entrance to the breezeway is visible at the end of the walkway. The living and dining rooms and kitchen are at one end of the lanai, the master bedroom suite behind it and the children's bedroom wing at the other end, angled away from the courtyard to maximize its area. Ossipoff used a shallower roof pitch than in his earlier designs to enable overhead clearance for the deep overhangs that protect the walkways and to accommodate the full-width sliding doors in the living room. The entry, which is sheltered under a giant monkey-pod tree, has no front door; one enters through the living or dining room directly from a porch. The disparate elements of the interior space are unified by the exposed wood with a bleached finish on the ceilings and walls. The house was bequeathed to the Honolulu Academy of Arts and now serves as the academy director's home.









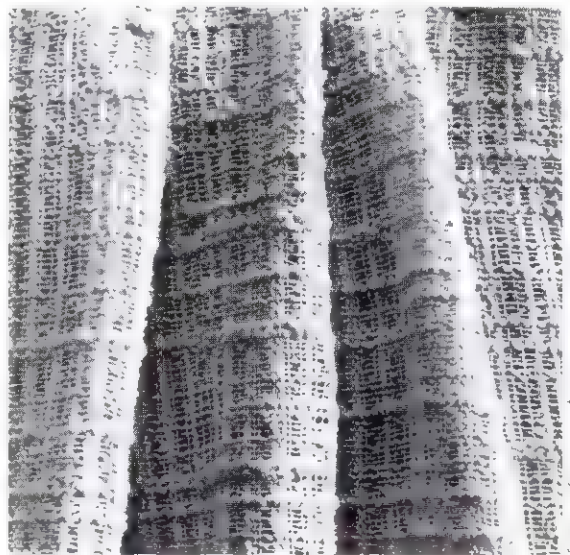
# STRUCTURE AND SURFACE

## Marianne Strengell and Woven Texture

By Leslie S. Edwards

Some artists paint with a brush, but Finnish weaver and textile designer Marianne Strengell used a handloom as her canvas. During her long career Strengell produced some of the most innovative textile designs of the mid 20th century. "The way we live and the pace of our lives are uniquely twentieth century," she maintained, "so why should we borrow designs from other times?" Like Bauhaus artist Anni Albers, Strengell broke from the tradition in which textile patterns reproduced naturalistic imagery or decorative ornament. She experimented with fiber combinations to create texture and produce contemporary textiles that would complement rather than overwhelm, modern architecture. She imparted this philosophy to her students at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan for 25 years while collaborating with architects, designers and manufacturers on private and corporate commissions. In 1994, one of Strengell's most famous students, fiber artist Ed Rossbach, wrote in *American Craft* that "her fabrics do not appear to strive to be interesting, or avant-garde, or innovative, or to carry statements. They are architectural materials."

Born in Helsinki in 1909 to architect and critic Gustav Strengell, who wrote about functionalism and art as part of everyday life, and interior designer Anna



**Opposite** Marianne Strengell in 1956 with her experimental Alcoa aluminum rug. Its metallic yarn was made by bonding aluminum with tinted adhesives into an envelope of transparent plastic film. The converted fiber defied tarnish and was soft enough to weave into bath towels. The rug is on permanent display at the Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Top** Strengell designed these experimental rug samples on the hand loom in 1941

**Above, right** *Leno* curtain fabric made of wool, cotton and rayon, for Boris Kroll Fabrics. The name *Leno* refers to a type of weave structure.





Wegelius, Strenge appreciated the relationship between art and architecture from an early age. She studied design at Helsinki's Central School of Industrial Arts under Arttu Brummer who stressed that knowledge of materials and their treatment was key to good design. Strenge later recalled that he "allowed and encouraged self-expression, phantasy [sic], inventiveness, enjoyment. I remember some pretty wild results and they were all mine."

In 1929, Strenge worked as a "girl Friday" in Stockholm for the Swedish Society for Arts and Crafts in preparation for the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition of Industrial Art, an influential event that firmly established Modernism and Functionalism in Scandinavia. When she returned to Helsinki, Strenge was one of several designers commissioned by architect J.S. Sirén to create textiles for Helsinki's Parliament House, a building that embodied the unity of architecture, art and industrial design. She also became chief designer of textiles for AB Hemflit Kotiahkeruus Oy, a producer of arts and crafts items.

**Left** Panel Number 7 was woven with natural fibers from the Philippines, as well as jute and a metallic binder.

**Below** Eero Saarinen, Loja Saarinen and Marianne Strenge in Strenge's Cranbrook studio, 1958

**Opposite** Samples of Strenge's designs, primarily for upholstery. The black and white printed casement fabric, top left, was conceived in Manila.









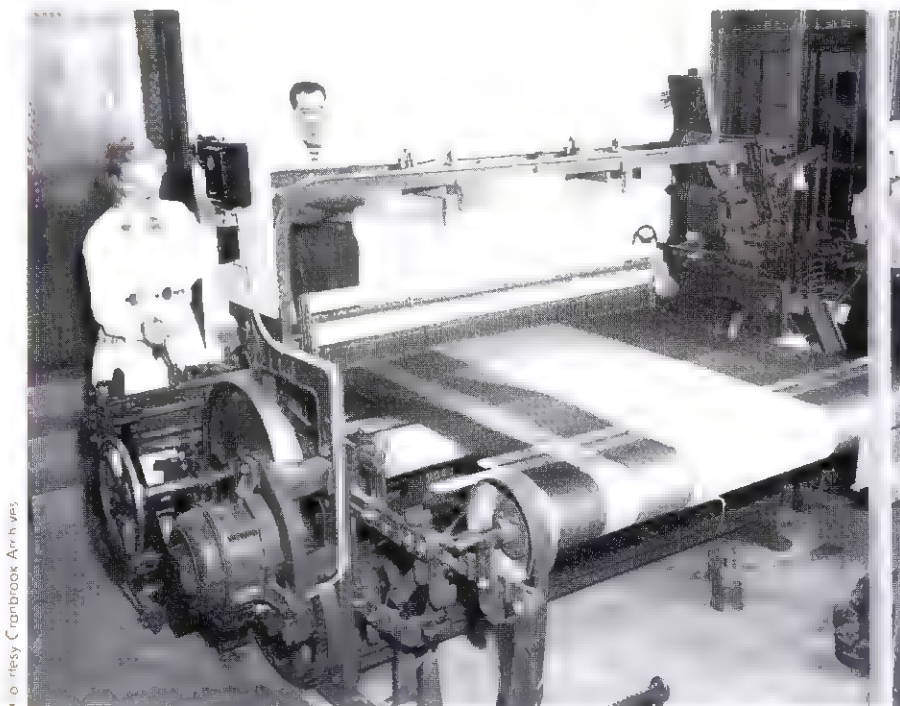


**Above** Strengell wove this sample of straw and natural fiber from the Philippines.

**Above, right** Cranbrook Academy of Art students Vera Helte and Howard Heath work on the power loom, while William Sparr, power loom instructor (1949–60), looks on. December 1949.

**Opposite, top** Strengell designed a luminous stage curtain in 1955 for Eero Saarinen's new auditorium at Massachusetts Institute of Technology to coordinate with the greens, blues and purples of the auditorium chairs. The fabric, glossy on one side and matte on the other, was cut into 18-inch diamonds, dyed in seven color variations and sewn together according to Strengell's color pattern. The curtain no longer exists.

**Opposite, bottom** Strengell demonstrates techniques to students in Cranbrook Academy of Art's weaving studio, 1943.



where her mother was managing director from 1926 to 1936. "This tastes a lot of nepotism," Strengell recalled in 1988, "but actually I was just right for it." She was assigned to design all the textiles for her mother's commissions. "I learned about common warps, and piece-dyeing . . . gradually I developed the courage to be original." Strengell experimented with monochromatic weavings and variations in warp and weft to create texture. By the age of 24, she was known for her design of textiles patterned by weave structure.

In 1936 Strengell left Finland to travel in the United States. For years, close family friend Eliel Saarinen had encouraged her to join him at Cranbrook Academy of Art. Finally, in February 1937, she made her first trip to Detroit, where childhood friend Eero Saarinen, Eliel's son, picked her up at the train station and drove her directly to Cranbrook for dinner at Saarinen House. "It was like coming home," she later recalled. "Thus started twenty-five unforgettable years for me and my family."

Weaving and architecture students were already collaborating at Cranbrook when Strengell arrived. Loja Saarinen, who founded Studio Loja Saarinen to produce tapestries, rugs and other textiles for the various Cranbrook institutions, believed that weavers should work together with architects in the planning stages, a philosophy that Strengell had long embraced. When Strengell became the weaving instructor at Cranbrook in 1937, she developed a curriculum that broke away from Saarinen's pictorial imagery, however. She emphasized working within "a framework of limitations," which hinged on investigation of the nature of the materials, and drew on her own education with Brummer. She encouraged her students to "experiment madly" and develop their own ideas. Strengell's curriculum included numerous weavers' parties and open houses where students gathered with her for informal talks. They visited local factories and interacted with clients, gaining valuable real-world experience.

Strengell arrived at Cranbrook during its evolutionary period of change and creativity, led by Charles Eames, Harry Bertoia, Eero Saarinen and others on the forefront of the modernist movement. The 1940s were critical years in Strengell's own development; her new direction was a blend of Scandinavian and Bauhaus Modernism, and she mastered variations in warp and weft as a way to produce

Courtesy Cranbrook Archives



Courtesy of Cranbrook Archives



Courtesy Cranbrook Archives



subtleties in the design and quality of the weave. Encouraged by Eliel Saarinen to take outside commissions, Strenge designed textiles for Russel Wright's "American Way" line of coordinated home furnishings and upholstery fabrics for Raymond Loewy and United Airlines.

In 1945, Strenge demonstrated her growing commitment to technology and design for mass production by securing a power loom for the weaving studio — one of the first used in an American university. "I felt very strongly that mass production was needed to be kept up," she explained, "that working the design for the power loom was important."

The postwar modernist movement emphasized the use of new materials, particularly manmade fibers. American Dorothy Liebes experimented with metals, wood and textured fibers, while Finnish weaver Greta Skogster-Lehtinen used wartime materials like birch bark and greaseproof paper. Strenge relished this same kind of exploration; her textiles demonstrated her growing fascination with fiber combinations including sisal, cow's hair wool, raffia, cellophane, linen, jute and rayon. "I like for each fiber to speak for itself," she

said, "and enhance the others used."

During this period, Strenge dedicated most of her time to collaborations with architects and designers. Through former Cranbrook student and close friend Benjamin Baldwin, Strenge obtained a 1946 commission from architects Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to design the textiles for the Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati.

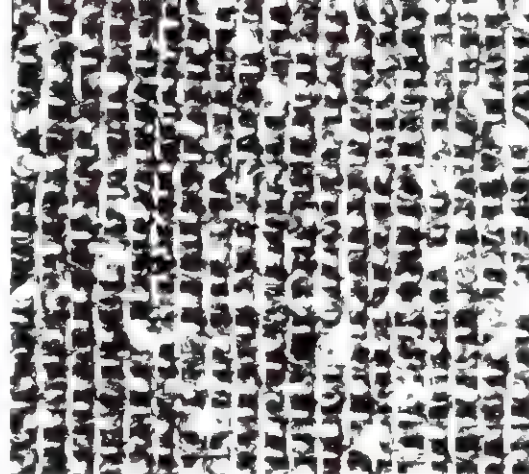
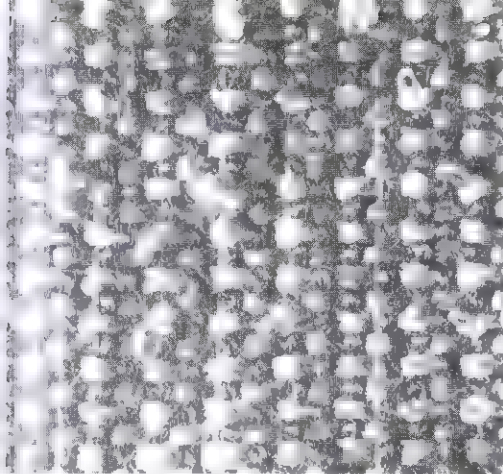
"I got in on that project when it was a hole in the ground," she said in a 1950 article in the *Detroit News*. "I worked with architects, so my fabrics grew with the steel and concrete." This was Strenge's first opportunity to design rich, textured fabrics that offset hard surfaces of stainless steel and marble, though she would have to work within wartime limitations and shortage of materials. Manufacturer George Royle agreed to undertake the challenge; Strenge provided hand-woven samples that Royle wove on the power loom to her exact specifications.

From 1946 to 1949, Strenge consulted for Owens-Corning Fiberglass, designing experimental fabrics with extruded glass yarns

**Below** Strenge on the outdoor porch of her house near the Cranbrook campus, surrounded by fabrics of her own design, August 1942.







for their New York headquarters. She also demonstrated the first use of the newly developed plastic-covered fiberglass yarns for upholstery fabrics, combining the fiberglass with mohair, wool and cotton to produce her signature pattern and weave effects.

In 1947, as part of a Cranbrook-infused design team, the Saarinen Swanson Group. Strengell designed textured upholstery with seven distinct weaves in a color palette created by Eliel's daughter, Pipsan Saarinen Swanson. She also consulted for Knoll Associates' new textiles division, where she capitalized on the effects of cotton, mohair, chenille, fiberglass and wool yarn contrasts for upholstery fabrics and adapted designs for manufacture on the power looms.

Strengell also hand-wove wall fabrics with paper, raffia, rayon and cotton, and designed window shades of fiberglass and rayon. She brought out an "all-plastic multifilament cloth" manufactured by the Judd-Williams Company of New York. She created textiles for the women's dormitories at Drake University designed by Saarinen, Saarinen and Associates, and woven rugs and fabrics for the lobby of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's Manhattan House apartment building. Additional collaborative projects included textiles for architects Marcel Breuer, Edward Durell Stone and Eero Saarinen.

In 1951, Strengell received her largest and most notable commission from Eero Saarinen: designing textiles for the new General Motors Technical Center in Warren, Michigan. The project, which spanned nine buildings, included textile designs for the restaurant, research library, private office spaces and the public lobbies. She balanced Saarinen's desire to humanize the contemporary building materials (stainless steel, aluminum and great expanses of glass) with the client's desire for strong, masculine interiors. "The center is a man's world so it should look the part," she told the *Detroit News* in 1956. "Strong colors used in contrast give a masculine effect." Her sensitive juxtaposition of colors and textures made each space an individually exciting experience; for the research library, she created a serene atmosphere in light and dark grays with a striped "rug within a rug" to define the waiting area. The most stimulating part of the project for Strengell was designing the textiles for Vice President of Styling Harley Earle's office. She curtained the interior

Courtesy GM Media Archives



**Top, left to right** Detail of an orange- and copper-colored upholstery fabric designed by Strengell for the General Motors Technical Center, 1956; detail of the off-white casement in cotton, rayon and Lurex used in Harley Earle's office at the General Motors Technical Center, 1956; detail of a gossamer-like sheer curtain of rayon and linen, 1942.

**Above** For Harley Earle's office at the General Motors Technical Center, Strengell covered the ceiling in a beige fabric, cross-hatched with strips of cherrywood to coordinate with Eero Saarinen's aluminum-ribbed cherrywood paneling. Strengell's white and orange upholstery and turquoise pillows complement the beige and brown color scheme and the cherrywood desk, designed by Saarinen.





**Above** Strengell's fabric *Shooting Stars* was one of her favorite designs, and the first screen-printed fabric sold by Knoll Textiles.

**Opposite** Strengell's husband, architect Olav Hammarstrom, designed their summer home in Wellfleet on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Built in 1954, it curved around extant trees; its two wings joined by a flagstone breezeway. The living room, pictured here, had glass panel walls on one side with wood track barn doors on the other opening to a breezeway. The Hammarstrom-designed furniture was complemented by Strengell's lush pile area rug and brightly colored textiles.

glass office windows in sheer white fabric with silver Lurex to reflect light and designed rough-textured upholstery in bright colors to complement the warm wood tones of Saarinen's furniture. The General Motors commission solidified Strengell's reputation and brought her international acclaim.

Also in 1951, Strengell was selected for a team of Cranbrook artists sponsored by the United States Economic Cooperation Administration and the United Nations to set up cottage industries in the Philippines. Strengell, with the assistance of her husband, architect Olav Hammarstrom, designed a flexible fly-shuttle loom adapted for the smaller physical stature of the Filipinos and conceived to increase production. Sturdy enough to weave heavy rugs as well as fine, sheer cloth, it was known locally as the "Strangle" loom and was still in use in the 1980s. Long eager to experiment with indigenous fibers, Strengell returned to Cranbrook with hundreds of pounds of Filipino fibers for testing. She employed lupiz (banana straw) for wall coverings

and shower curtains and the harsh thread of the maguey tree as a contrast to smooth natural fibers and synthetics. She developed sturdy upholstery fabrics with saluyot (jute), hemp, abaca, pandanus and coconut leaves and by 1956, Manila's Chrysler plant was employing Strengell's designs for their automotive upholstery. She later served as consultant for cottage industry programs in Jamaica and Appalachia.

Early in her career Strengell learned the value of close collaboration with manufacturers. In 1954, Ralph and Gordon Getsinger of Chatham Manufacturing in Elgin, North Carolina, commissioned Strengell to design 100 percent synthetic experimental fabrics for automobile interiors. Strengell wove hundreds of samples with yarns spun at the Chatham mill, and attended design meetings with various automotive styling departments to ensure quality control. Strengell's work for Chatham helped to revolutionize automobile fabrics in the mid 1950s. "Before me, all was enormously slick and shiny," she later recalled. "I worked in tweedy types of fabric and more texture than pattern."

In 1956, Strengell was asked by the Alcoa Aluminum Company to participate in its Forecast project, an initiative to develop innovative aluminum objects for the "home of tomorrow" with leading designers such as Alexander Girard, Isamu Noguchi, Charles Eames and Elliot Noyes. Strengell's charge was to create a rug of metallic yarn. She admitted that it took her "considerable time to adjust to the idea of an all metallic rug," so she worked out several prototypes. The result was an experimental radiant heat rug woven of black and gray wool and viscose with colored jute used to form a background for the "jewel-like glow" of 30 shades of metallic yarn.

By the late 1950s, Strengell's commissions took her farther afield from Cranbrook and in 1957 she embarked on a world lecture tour with her husband. Finally in 1961, Strengell left to move east with her family. "The past twenty-five years have been wonderful, happy and productive," she wrote in her resignation letter "and I will always feel Cranbrook is my home."

She continued to exhibit, experiment with a wide range of media particularly nature photography and collage, and design ecclesiastical textiles. She worked with manufacturers in Hong Kong, Japan and the U.S. and was the weave and color consultant for Karastan Rug Mills (New York) from 1969 to 1971. During the 1970s, Strengell traveled extensively and pursued her research with indigenous fibers. By the 1980s, age, deteriorating health and the untimely death of her daughter caused Strengell to slow down design production. "Because of economic necessity, I have spent the last two decades creating textiles for the industry," she said. "All these years my urge to free myself from the limitations imposed on me by clients, equipment, market and merchandising has grown — as has my urge to create textiles exciting and memorable by themselves."

A consummate and versatile master weaver, Marianne Strengell left her mark on nearly every type of textile. Rooted in Scandinavian handicraft, she nevertheless embraced new technologies, new materials and new ideas and wove herself into the fabric of modern American design. ■

**Leslie S. Edwards** is an archivist at Cranbrook Archives, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. Previous publications include essays in *Cranbrook Art Museum: 100 Treasures* and *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future*.





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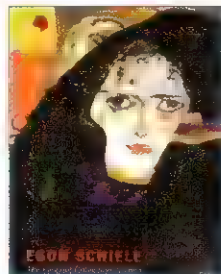
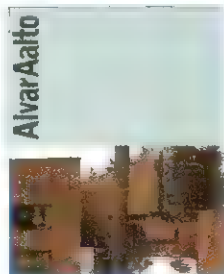
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A young boy with dark hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a light-colored bow tie, is sitting in the driver's seat of a green car. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The car's interior is visible, including the steering wheel and a red seat. The background outside the car is slightly blurred.

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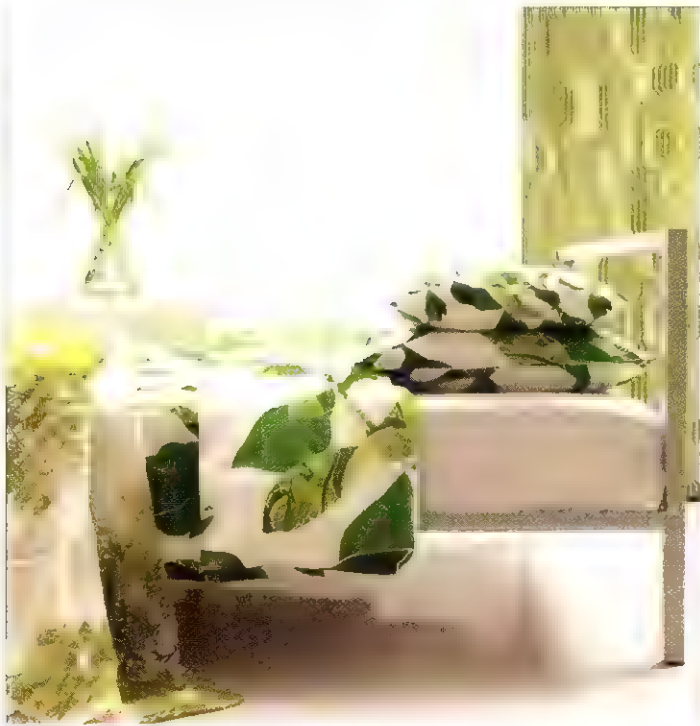
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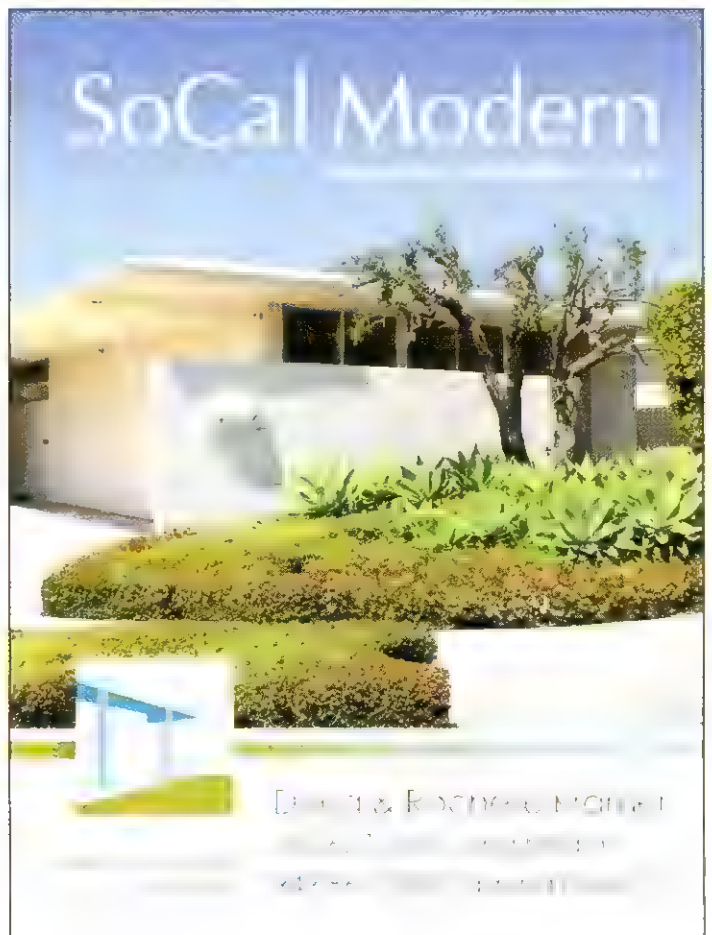
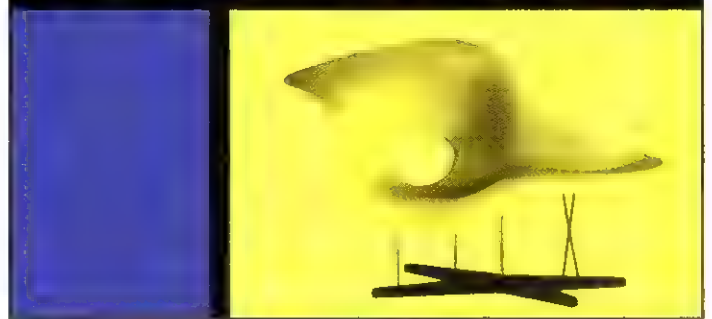
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# PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Photo by Stephen Brookes



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**Top** Lecture halls for the Institute for Foreign Languages in Phnom Penh.

**Above** Vann Molyvann, 81, the driving force behind New Khmer Architecture.

It's a still, clear morning in Phnom Penh, but storm clouds are gathering over one of the city's most striking buildings. Empty and abandoned in an unkempt field, the light, sleek lines of the National Theater rise unexpectedly into the air, soaring over the bland office blocks and Buddhist temples nearby. With its sharp angles, walls of glass and playful interior spaces, it is a tour de force of 1960s Modernism — utterly original, and as captivating as a mirage.

Designed in 1964 by the innovative Khmer architect Vann Molyvann, the theater is only one of dozens of important, yet still little-known, modernist buildings in Cambodia, all built during a spectacular architectural flowering between 1953 and 1970. Fusing European modernist ideas with Khmer vernacular architecture, Molyvann almost single-handedly changed the face of Phnom Penh, launching what has come to be known as "New Khmer Architecture." And while many of his masterpieces are under threat from new development, they still comprise one of the most intriguing collections of modernist architecture in Asia.

Known in the 1930s as "the Pearl of the Orient," Phnom Penh today is an open, low-slung city of broad avenues and tree-lined lanes, with an eclectic mix of pale yellow colonial villas, bland apartment blocks, elegant Art Deco buildings, graceful temples and tiny houses jammed up chockablock against each other.

And over the past decade, it has been slowly coming to life. Cambodia spent most of the 20th century enduring one nightmare after another: colonized by France, dragged into the Vietnam war, embroiled in civil strife, subjected to the horrors of the Khmer Rouge (when Phnom Penh was emptied) and invaded by the Vietnamese. And even now, though political stability seems to be

restored the country remains poor, corrupt and largely isolated

But there was one bright moment in the years right after the country's 1953 independence from France. Determined to make the capital a symbol of Cambodia's forward-looking, confident attitude, the ruling Prince Norodom Sihanouk, commissioned more than 100 new buildings from a group of architects led by the young Molyvann, who had recently returned from studying with Le Corbusier at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

Barely thirty Molyvann was just four years younger than Sihanouk himself, and the two made a formidable team. There were already several modern architectural gems in the city like the cruciform Deco-inspired **Central Market**, between Streets 167 and 136 in the town center, from 1937 and the **Phnom Penh Railway Station**, on Street 107, from 1932. But Molyvann had absorbed Le Corbusier's ideas and wanted to infuse them with a distinctly Khmer sensibility, using elements from the ancient temples of Angkor and paying particular attention to the problems of flooding and extreme heat that Cambodia endures

"We could not simply repeat things as they were done in Europe," says Molyvann, who, at 81 and retired, still lives in the airy, light-filled house on Mao Tse Tung Boulevard he designed for himself in the late 1960s. "We needed to think with new ideas, to build with a Cambodian approach

Many of those new ideas are embodied in what may be Molyvann's most important work the **National Sports Complex** Sihanouk and Monireth Boulevards Built in 1963-64, it is vast without being grandiose a 60,000 seat stadium an 8,000-seat indoor



Photo by Stephen Brinnes

**Above** The stadium of the National Sports Complex in Phnom Penh.

**Below** The National Sports Complex



Photo by Stephen Brinnes





**Above** The Knai Bang Chatt resort in Kep is made up of three modernist villas

## ELSEWHERE IN CAMBODIA

There are modernist gems outside of Phnom Penh, too, including a Deco-filled 1930 house in Battambang called **La Villa** that recently opened as a six-room hotel, and the Molyvann-designed **SKD Brewery** and **National Bank of Cambodia** in the southern coastal town of Sihanoukville.

Also on the coast is the town of Kep, which flourished as a seaside resort during the 1960s. Amid the palm trees are some intriguing modernist villas (Sihanouk had one built here), and three of the finest have been restored and turned into the elegant 11-room **Knai Bang Chatt** resort. Its main building, the multi-terraced Blue Villa from 1962, is a lively three-story house with balconies looking out over the sea.



**Above** The pool and dining room at the Amansara Resort, Siem Reap.

To get to the heart of Khmer architecture, though, it is necessary to head north to the temples of Angkor. And as it happens, one of the country's finest examples of mid-century residential architecture is in the neighboring town of Siem Reap. Designed by the French architect Laurent Mondet, the sleek, elegant **Villa Princi re** was built in 1962 by Prince Sihanouk as a guesthouse for visiting dignitaries. In its heyday luminaries, including Leonid Brezhnev, Peter O'Toole and Jackie Onassis all basked by its whimsical zigzag pool and dined in the circular dining room, where the Prince screened his latest films.

Though the property fell into near-ruin during the Khmer Rouge era, Amanresorts bought and thoroughly renovated it in 2002, under the direction of Kerry Hill Architects of Australia. Enlarging and modernizing the rooms, they used a minimalist color scheme of whites and grays to emphasize the clean, austere lines of the buildings. Rather than trying to incorporate traditional Khmer references they stayed true to the original, '60s style, with superb results; the Prince's villa, now known as the **Amansara**, located on Pokambor Avenue, is a must-see on any architectural tour of Asia.

The recent development of Siem Reap has had other benefits: a number of colonial buildings in the old French Quarter have been renovated and turned into restaurants, art galleries and guest houses, and there are now over 100 hotels in the town. The most architecturally entertaining is the high-end **Hotel de la Paix** (designed by Bill Bensley), on Sivutha Boulevard, which mixes Art Deco, Angkor references and international chic with cheerful abandon. With gas-fired sconces over its entrance and hanging beds in the courtyard, it may be over the top for some tastes, but its architectural playfulness is guaranteed to keep you smiling — and its restaurant, **Meric**, may be the best in the entire country.



sports hall, Olympic-sized swimming pools and tennis courts, all seamlessly integrated in a 96-acre landscape of open courtyards and ornamental ponds. Still in operation, the complex is open for visits

With its bold muscular contours, the main sports hall makes an appropriately athletic statement. But inside there is a surprising openness; light and air filter in freely through the vented walls, and pools and streams run along the walkways, cooling the air and helping control the deluges of the monsoon

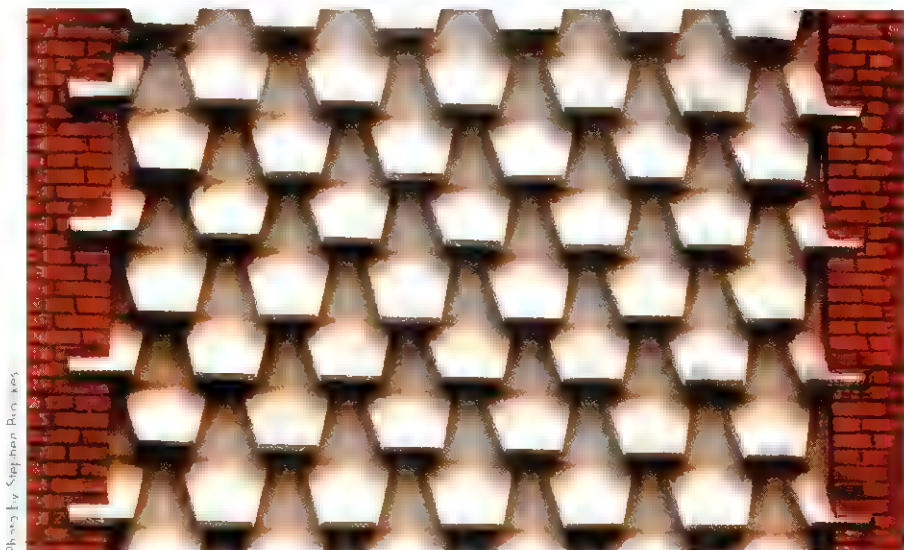
And almost everywhere there are references to the iconic temples of Angkor, which lie at the heart of Cambodia's identity. The stadium's pools echo the vast reservoirs — known as *barays* — which surround the temples to store water and contain flooding while the elevated walkways reflect the massive one that leads into Angkor Wat. Even the louvered walls, which keep heat out but allow light in, reference the ancient temples.

That lively interplay between European Modernism and Khmer vernacular architecture can be seen in virtually all Molyvann's buildings. The **Independence Monument** (1960), *Norodom Blvd.* with its distinctive lotus bud shape, emulates the Arc de Triomphe yet is modeled on the central tower of Angkor Wat. The **National Theater** (1966), *Sothea's Boulevard*, integrates the traditional *barays* with modern suspended staircases and cantilevered triangular roofs. And the **Chaktomuk Conference Hall** (1961), *Preah Sisowath Quay*, though thoroughly contemporary, was modeled on the shape of the fan palm, a plant virtually emblematic of Cambodia's rural villages

Some of the most overt references to Angkor can be found at the **Institute for Foreign Languages**, next to the Royal University of Phnom Penh on *Pochentong Boulevard*. In homage to the kilometer-long entry passage at Angkor it is reached via a long elevated concrete walkway that leads to the main building. The walkway even includes modernist versions of *nagas* — the stone serpents that guard the Angkor temples

And here, too, modern materials have been adapted to traditional uses. While the

**Right, top to bottom** Three views of the National Theater: soon after construction in the 1960s; the interior today, with louvers that let in light and air; an exterior detail of the louvers





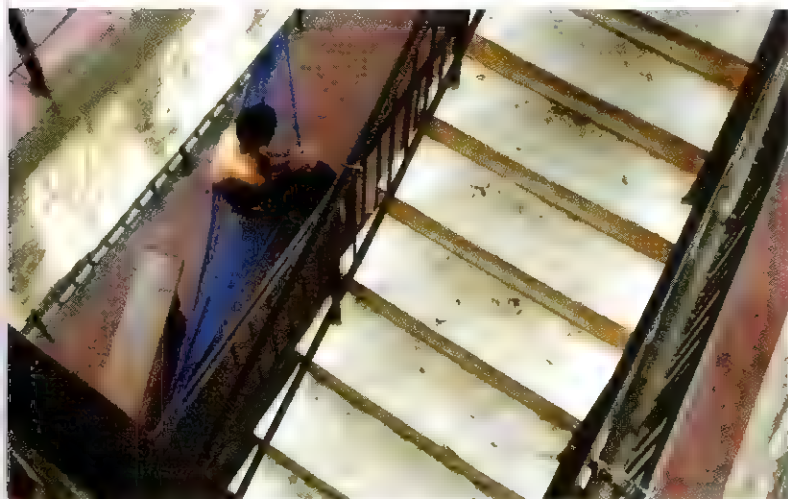


Photo by Stephen Brookes



Photo by Stephen Brookes

buildings are largely brick and concrete, they are designed to minimize direct sunlight, maximize airflow and reduce the risk of flooding. But there's a whimsical quality to them, as well: the institute's library is modeled after traditional woven palm-leaf hats (and is set in its own small, circular moat) and the lecture halls are cantilevered imaginatively out over angled "legs" that give them a coiled, animal-like energy.

The Institute for Foreign Languages is still in active use, as are many of Molyvann's other enduring designs, including the **Ministry of Finance**, the **Council of Ministers** and the "100 Houses" residential housing project. But others are decaying and many are threatened by the helter-skelter development now underway almost everywhere in the city. Real estate speculation and a lack of oversight, says Molyvann, have resulted in reckless building, with little respect for the environment or Cambodia's architectural heritage.

A planned renovation of the National Sports Complex for example, has turned into a disaster. A Taiwanese company was given the contract to restore the main buildings in 2000, in exchange for the right to build on some of the surrounding grounds. But the developers filled in Molyvann's carefully planned ponds (leading to flooding in the area), threw up a cheap, ugly retail building next to the stadium and haven't even begun the renovation.

The National Theater (also known as the Tonle Bassac Theater) faces an even more urgent threat. It has been steadily deteriorating since a fire gutted much of it in 1994, destroying the distinctive glass pyramid at its top. Cambodia's current King, Norodom Sihamoni, has said that he wants to see it rebuilt, but no funding has been provided, and the Theater is largely boarded up. A local telecommunications company, meanwhile, is reported to want the site for other uses.

"The land there is too valuable now," says Molyvann, "and it's expensive to renovate. The Bassac Theater will be destroyed. They want to put in a department store."

For other buildings, it may already be too late. Molyvann introduced apartment blocks to Cambodia with his two **Front du Bassac** buildings (1964) located behind the National Theater, designed along Le Corbusier's idea of the "modular." Once landmarks, their striking design has largely been obliterated. One was renovated beyond all recognition, turned into a faceless box and renamed, ironically, the "Build Bright University." The other is in terrible condition and is likely to be torn down, says one architect in Phnom Penh, to make room for a 46-story development.

Molyvann left Cambodia in 1972, practiced architecture in Switzerland and Israel for several years, then worked with the United Nations Human Settlements Program in Kenya, Burundi and Laos. He returned to Cambodia in 1991. "We're starting to introduce property rights, respect for law and so on," he says, as the sound of construction drifts up from the busy street below. "But I'm concerned about the future. In ten years, I don't know what will be left."

**Stephen Brookes** is a journalist based in Washington D.C. and a classical music critic for *The Washington Post*.

**Left, top** Staircase in the Front du Bassac housing block.

**Left** The Front du Bassac, Phnom Penh's first housing block — designed along Corbusian lines — is in decay and may be razed.

## VISITING PHNOM PENH

Phnom Penh is a manageably sized city and most of its important modernist structures can be absorbed in a day. The best way to see them is in an open-air tuk-tuk with an architect as your guide, which a non-profit group called Khmer Architecture Tours can arrange (The cost is well under \$100 for a full day; contact them at [www.ka-tours.org](http://www.ka-tours.org).) Before you go, get the essential *Building Cambodia: New Khmer Architecture 1953–1970* by Darryl Collins and Helen Grant Ross.

While there are plenty of hotels in Phnom Penh, few hold much architectural interest. One notable exception is the historic **Hotel Le Royal**, 92 Rukhak Vithei Daun Penh, built in 1929. A luxurious refuge from Phnom Penh's gritty streets, it was carefully restored by Raffles in 1997 with a blend of colonial and Art Deco styles and, at about \$130 a night, is a bargain. It's worth a tour on its own, as is the nearby **National Library** (or **Bibliothèque**) from 1922, a well-preserved example of French neo-classical architecture.

Other interesting hotels include **Le Pavillon**, 227 Street 19, a lovingly rebuilt French colonial villa (about \$50 a night) and the popular **Foreign**



Photo by Stelene Irmer

**Above** The library of the Institute for Foreign Languages.

**Correspondent's Club**, 363 Sisowath Quay, in a fine colonial-era building along the river. Its stylish (but rather noisy) rooms run about \$60 a night, and the open-air restaurant on the top floor is the best place in the city for mid-century surroundings and great views of the waterfront.



Photo by Stephen Brookes

**Above** The 1937 Central Market in Phnom Penh.

## SHOPPING IN CAMBODIA

Shopping for vintage artifacts is a challenge in Cambodia; during their 1975–79 rule, the Khmer Rouge tried to wipe out all evidence of the country's culture, and few items from the colonial era survived. As always in Asia, the best way to find unusual pieces is to locate a resourceful dealer, tell him what you want, then just wait a few days; the results can be remarkable.

But there are a few shops in Phnom Penh where interesting things surface from time to time: **Bazar, art de vivre**, 28 Sihanouk Boulevard, has a worthwhile collection of mostly Asian furniture and antiques, and there are several dusty little antique shops along Street 240 with a constantly-changing selection of curiosities. My favorite is the chic, eclectic **Le Léopard Bleu**, 61 Street 240, which has a fine selection of 20th-century paintings (\$20 to \$1,500), as well as reproductions of Art Deco furniture (nicely designed, but a bit rough around the edges) starting at \$200.



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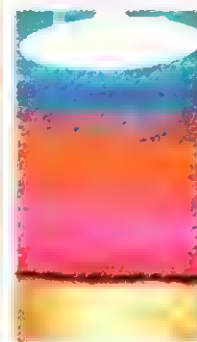
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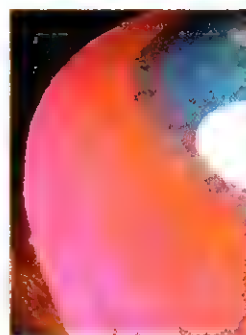
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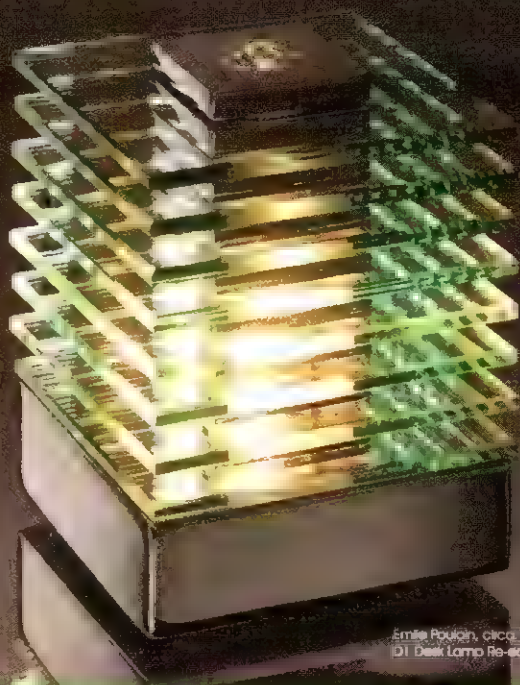


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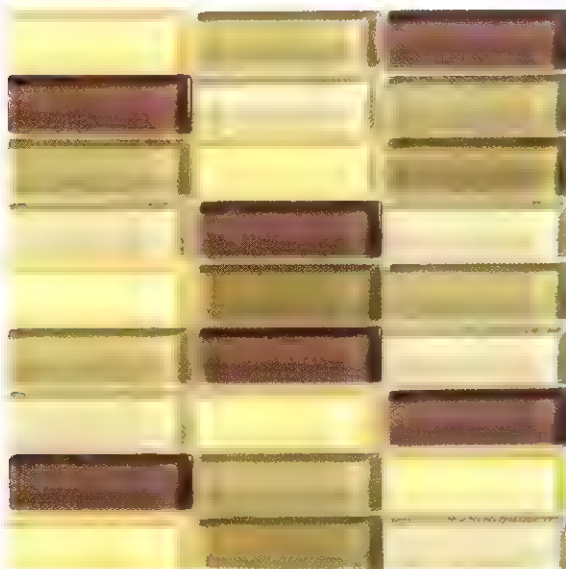


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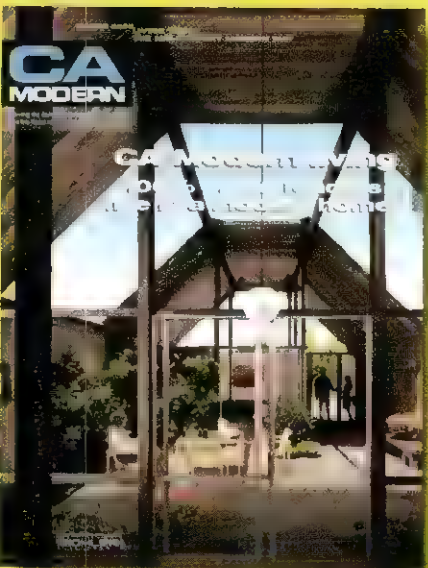
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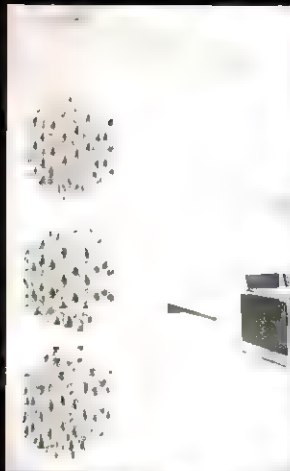
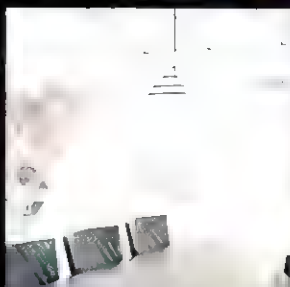
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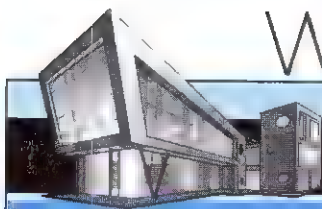


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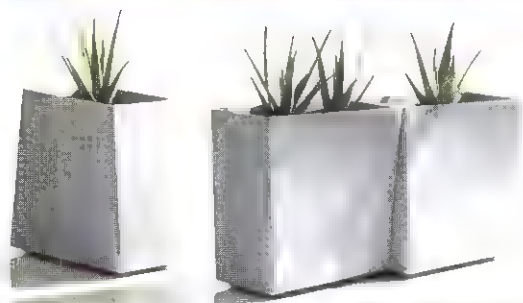


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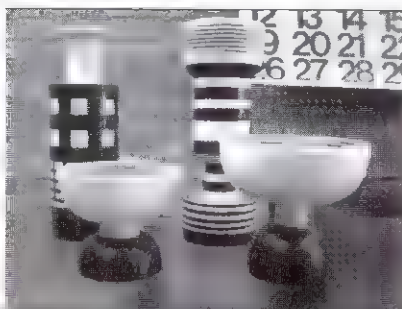
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## MODERN THOUGHTS

By Sandy McLendon

Author Sinclair Lewis often savaged his native Midwest in satirical novels like *Main Street* (1920) the story of the sensitive Carol Kennicott, thoroughly appalled by the ugly architecture and huckster-

ism around her. Evidently the Midwest heeded Lewis because many of America's architectural and aesthetic advances of the mid-century years came from the region. Nowhere were they more apparent than in Midland, Michigan, a corporate town that was home to the Dow Chemical company. In **Alden B. Dow: *Midwestern Modern*** (W.W. Norton & Company hardcover, \$50, 239 pages,

185 color illustrations, 220 black-and-white), author Diane Maddex turns from her five books on Frank Lloyd Wright to one of the master's most talented proteges, Dow her Alden Dow (1904–83). Her portrait of the architect reveals his thoughtful, playful nature, linking it to the elegance and fun of his oeuvre; her book is a most satisfying look at Dow, his work and his well-lived life.

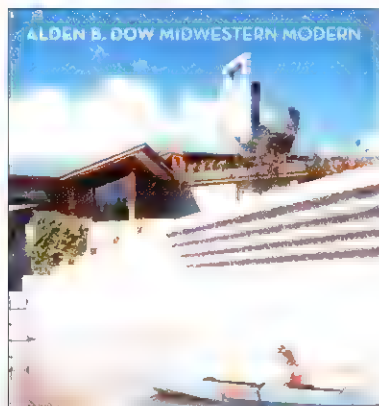
Dow's approach to Organic Architecture was rather different from Wright's, more practical and client oriented. His Unit Blocks, recycled from cinder ash, were one of the first "green" building products. His own house, which contained his offices, included the astonishing Submarine Room, a conference space half-submerged in a pond; the resulting linkage between indoors and out is unequalled even by Wright himself. Dow's talent made him the most popular architect in Midland, with residential, civic and corporate projects transforming the town from mundane to an oasis of Modernism. Today, Midland stands as a tribute to Dow's vision, with many of his works still beloved by appreciative owners — a *Main Street* of which Carol Kennicott would have approved wholeheartedly.

George Nelson (1908–86) was one of the leading design lights of the mid-century era; his firm, George Nelson Associates, created the *Bull* clock, the *Coconut* chair and the *Marshmallow* sofa. He was also design director at Herman Miller. While Nelson didn't personally design everything with which he is generally credited (Irving Harper and Isamu Noguchi, among others, did much of the actual creative work), he was also a writer and architecture critic of the first order. In ***Building a New Europe: Portraits of Modern Architects, Essays by George Nelson 1935–1936*** (Yale University Press, hardcover, \$45, 192 pages, 126 black-and-white illustrations), Nelson's talent for helping the lay reader understand architectural masterworks leaps off every page. Originally a series of essays for *Pencil Points*, an architectural journal later renamed *Progressive Architecture*, Nelson's writings introduced Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Gio Ponti, among others, to America's consciousness. Not content merely to write of form, plan and structure, Nelson perceptively traced the

social changes in 1930s

Europe (including hints of the war to come), helping readers understand how they made a new architecture inevitable. He also gave insight into the personalities that were shaping Modernism, telling of Mies's perfectionism and Le Corbusier's infuriating superciliousness ("People are very stupid, especially the ones who should know better," Corbu said of one client). Nelson found worthwhile architecture everywhere, even in a zoo shelter that presaged Morris Lapidus's woggles and cheeseholes, designed by the British firm Tecton. Robert A.M. Stern's foreword and Kurt W. Forster's introduction set the stage for Nelson's essays, leading the reader down pathways just as delightful today as they were in the 1930s.

With the rediscovery, rehabilitation and recent sale of one of Jean Prouvé's *Maisons Tropicales*, prefabricated aluminum houses designed in 1949 and erected in the Congo, Prouvé is "hot" again. That creates a lot of questions for those who don't quite know who he was or what he did; questions that are handily answered by the slender, yet highly informative ***Prouvé*** by Nils Peters (Taschen, softcover, \$9.99, 96 pages, 156 illustrations in color and black-and-white). Many an author of overblown coffee table books would do well to look at this little gem of a volume, whose pages are packed with more than just facts. Prouvé's appreciation for structural concerns and the playfulness of his designs are clearly communicated here. Architecturally Prouvé tended towards exoskeletons (*Maison Tropicale* and the *Grand Palais* of the Lille Fairgrounds), and shells (his *maisons coques* of 1950–52). But he was perfectly capable of designing inventively in a more conventional idiom, as demonstrated in his *Tour Nobel* office building of 1967–69, the first office tower in France. His chairs and tables of plywood and metal are so animated, they seem ready to dance around the room. While Prouvé's designs are not likely to turn up at local antique stores and flea markets (that sale of a *Maison Tropicale* fetched nearly \$5 million), he is a designer whose work should be known to everyone, and Peters's book will help. ■



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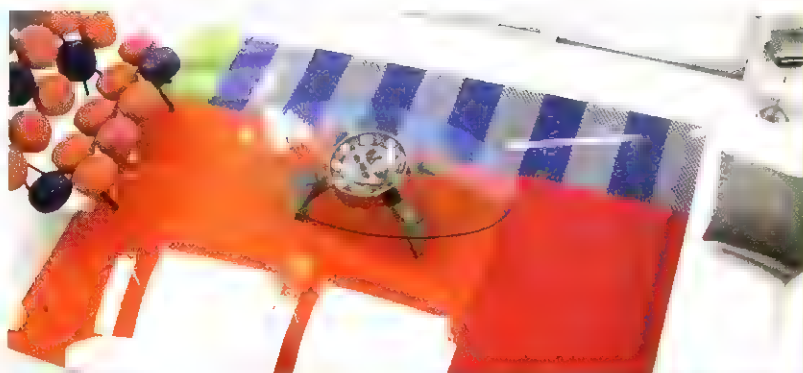
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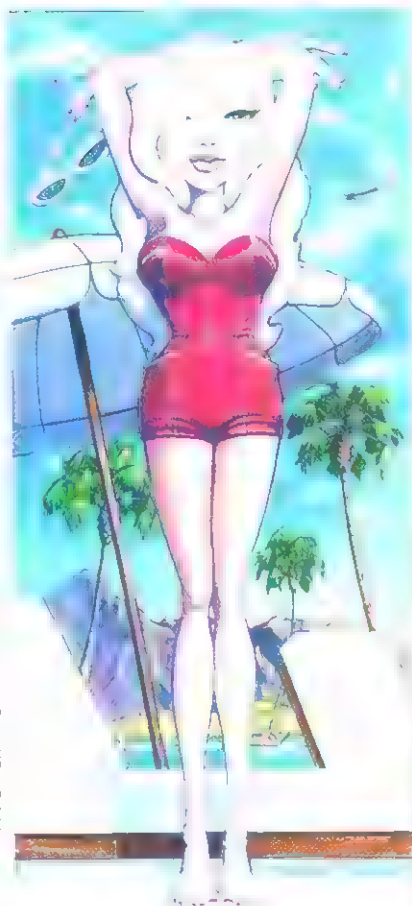
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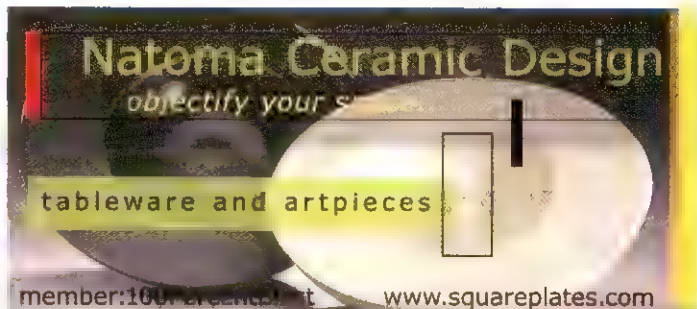
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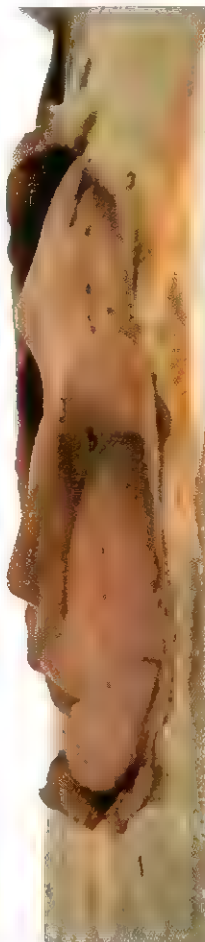
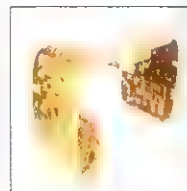
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## Bamboo's New Shoots

Japanese-American artist and designer Isamu Noguchi (1904–88) engaged in many creative collaborations during his career, from stage sets for modern dance pioneer Martha Graham to a model of the Dymaxion car for architect and inventor Buckminster Fuller to a New York City playground (unbuilt) with architect Louis Kahn. One of his lesser known partnerships was forged during a brief visit to Tokyo in 1950 with Japanese industrial designer Isamu Kenmochi (1914–71). Their *Bamboo Basket Chair* is a harmonious fusion of traditional Japanese craft with mid-century technological innovation.

Although the chair was intended for production, only a single prototype was made — now long gone. But curator Bonnie Rychlak of the Noguchi Museum in Long Island City, New York, had become intrigued by photographs of the chair and its place in Noguchi's career. Determined to recreate it, she took computer-rendered drawings to Kenmochi Design Associates in Japan. The firm is busier today designing bullet trains than furniture, but Kenmochi's protégé, principal designer Tetsuo Matsumoto, his colleagues and a master bamboo weaver labored for seven months to replicate what had taken two weeks in 1950. This chair and numerous other objects, models and drawings by the two designers are on view through March 16 at the museum in "Designs: Isamu Noguchi and Isamu Kenmochi."

Noguchi, who was raised in Japan and the United States and traveled widely, designed many pieces of furniture for production; perhaps the two most famous are his 1944 glass and wood coffee table for Herman Miller and his series of more than 100 Akari paper lanterns (1951–86). In contrast, Kenmochi lived his entire life in Japan, and first traveled abroad at the age of 40. And while Kenmochi's copious designs, ranging from silverware to ashtrays to interiors, are modern classics in Japan, they are all but unknown in the West.



Kenmochi was greatly influenced by Bauhaus-trained architect Bruno Taut (1880–1938), a refugee from Hitler's Germany, with whom he worked at the government-sponsored Industrial Arts Research Institute (IARI) in northern Japan in the 1930s. Founded as a traditional crafts school, IARI turned its attention to developing Japan's immature production methods and nonexistent export market after World War II. Kenmochi absorbed Taut's efforts to reconcile the International Style with Japan's indigenous traditions, and developed his own style of "Japanese Modern." He

was particularly interested in advancing chair design in Japan; Western-style chairs had begun to replace tatami mats in the home only in the 1920s.

Noguchi was a celebrated international artist and designer in 1950 when he was invited to design the interior furnishings for a



**Above** A 2007 replica of the *Bamboo Basket Chair* designed in 1950 by Isamu Noguchi in collaboration with Isamu Kenmochi and produced at the Industrial Arts Research Institute in Japan.

**Below** Isamu Noguchi, left, and Isamu Kenmochi seated together on the *Bamboo Basket Chair* prototype, 1950.

lounge at Keio University in Tokyo. Kenmochi offered him studio space at IARI to complete the pieces. According to Rychlak, Noguchi did not aim to incorporate Western design into the emerging post-war Japanese aesthetic; rather, he was seeking new strategies to bring art and design into modern life. He was intrigued by Kenmochi's experiments with furniture, in particular his attempts to use bamboo basket weaving for a chair. Noguchi had taken many photographs of traditional bamboo and rattan objects in Indonesia, where he had traveled before coming to Japan, notes Rychlak. She believes that he may also have had in mind the trials with bent wood that the Eameses and others were conducting in the U.S. Noguchi and Kenmochi conceived of a bamboo chair with a single bent iron rod forming the legs and armature, similar to a chair that Kenmochi had designed (also replicated for the current exhibition), and enlisted a craftsman to weave it from bamboo strips.

In a mere two weeks, Noguchi co-designed and completed the *Bamboo Basket Chair*, and produced benches, stools, a table, two sculptures and a wall relief for the university lounge. These pieces were displayed at the popular and influential Mitsukoshi Department Store in Tokyo, after which Noguchi returned to the U.S.

Noguchi made regular trips to Japan following this productive period, and though he continued to produce new Akari lamp designs, he created only a few more furniture pieces, focusing instead on sculpture and landscape design. After opening his own office in 1955, Kenmochi helped elevate Japanese industrial design to an international standard. The two designers remained close, and Noguchi made numerous introductions for Kenmochi on the Japanese architect's visits to the U.S. to designers such as the Eameses, Walter Gropius and Alexander Girard. After Kenmochi's untimely death, Noguchi welcomed his son to New York, and "kept an eye on him," says Rychlak; he even enlisted him to help sand the floors of his new studio — which houses the museum where this show is today.

— Kate Fogarty



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